


THE
BRITISH
BLIND



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

THE BRITISH BLIND

*Printed in Great Britain by
Buck Bros. & Harding, Ltd.,
London, E.17.*



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation



THE AUTHOR.

The British Blind:

*A Revolution in Thought
and Action*

BY

BEN PURSE

Author of "THE ECONOMICS OF INDUSTRY," "SOME COMMERCIAL
ASPECTS OF CRAFT INSTRUCTION," "THE CENSORSHIP OF
CHARITIES," "HOME TEACHING AND VISITING OF THE
ADULT BLIND," "THE BLIND IN INDUSTRY,"
ETC., ETC.

LONDON :

BUCK BROS. & HARDING, LTD.,
6 & 7, WEST AVENUE, E.17.

1928

3
HV1945

P8

copy 4

RECEIVED

1951

8/16/51

RECEIVED

1951

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
FOREWORD	
I. INTRODUCTORY	1
II. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE BLIND PERSONS' ACT, 1920	7
III. INDUSTRIAL METHODS AND CONDITIONS EXAMINED	15
IV. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON PRODUCTION COSTS ...	25
EXTRACT FROM THE ANNUAL STATEMENT OF THE TRADE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND BRITISH COUNTRIES	36
V. ARE BLIND WORKERS BEING EXPLOITED ? ...	37
VI. METHODS OF REMUNERATION	47
VII. DISABILITY ALLOWANCES CONSIDERED	53
VIII. PENSIONS AND RELIEF IN BRITAIN	68
IX. PROVISION FOR THE UNEMPLOYABLE BLIND ...	83
X. PLACEMENT WORK	92

FOREWORD

I am pleased to accede to Mr. Purse's request that I should write a few lines as a foreword to this Book which he has just written.

Without in the slightest degree seeking to depreciate benevolent activities undertaken in other countries, we have, I think, arrived at the stage when it is probably true to say that nowhere is the system of caring for the blind more comprehensive, or indeed more successful, than in the British Isles.

This does not mean that we have discovered a panacea for all our ills; much less is it intended to imply that the steps so far taken are, of necessity, leading to the coveted goal of economic independence. We, however, hope and believe that the processes of education and training are being directed to the achievement of this end.

This little volume examines some of the important problems which still await a satisfactory solution,—the writer is impelled by no other motive. Though we have built many temporary bridges, a sure and permanent structure can only be erected and maintained by the exercise of much patience and devoted service, and to that end workers on behalf of the blind are directing their energies. At the same time it is obvious that if the blind are, in spite of their handicap, to assume in any real sense the rôle of true citizenship in the future, they must freely recognise that they, too, have duties and responsibilities to discharge towards society, and be prepared to make in practical service the highest contribution of which they are capable.

Doubtless there will be many readers of this work who, like myself, may find it difficult to accept the whole of the conclusions reached by the writer; but this is inevitable, for in such a sphere of activity

no one man may claim to possess a monopoly of the truth. It will, however, I am sure, be conceded that the book is thoughtful and reflective, and so long as it is calculated to encourage clear thinking in connection with the complicated issues treated, it cannot fail to be of real service to all who are desirous of making a close study of the intricate and difficult problems with which it deals.

I am strongly persuaded that any attempt to eliminate the voluntary principle by a rigid insistence upon complete State or Municipal control will neither make for efficiency in administration nor secure a greater measure of independence or economic freedom for the Blind. The three-fold partnership discussed in the following pages, so long as it can be maintained, will obviate many evils and dispose of otherwise fundamental difficulties. The continuity, therefore, of such a system must make a strong appeal to all those who are not obsessed by some particular prejudice.

In almost every chapter of this book there is a clearly revealed disposition to submit every issue to a process of closely reasoned analysis, and I venture to think that such a method will be generally approved by all those who set a value on this kind of literature. Sentimental considerations are so often permitted to obscure facts, that it is good sometimes to have the issues examined in all their nakedness so that we may see them in their true perspective.

The present volume is supplementary to a book written by Mr. Purse and published in 1925 under the title, "The Blind in Industry," and in this impression the latest available information on many aspects of welfare work is carefully recorded.

. P. M. EVANS.

12th October, 1928.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"Completeness, indeed, is but another name for ascertained limitation. The greatest and highest faculties of man are exactly those in which he most feels his weakness and imperfection. They are at present only half fulfilled prophecies of powers which, as we believe, shall yet find an ample field for unrestricted development."

—BISHOP WESTCOTT.

IT is well-nigh thirty-five years ago since the writer of this book may be said to have been first interested in the social and industrial conditions of the blind.

If one may be permitted to look back for a moment upon the circumstances that prevailed in the year 1893, when compulsory education for the blind became the law of the land, and to compare the then existing conditions with the facilities provided to-day, it is indeed true to assert that a complete revolution has taken place, both in thought and action, in all the essential aspects of welfare work.

It is sometimes held by those who cling fondly to the traditions of the later Victorian era that this so-called progress has brought in its train many disillusionments and disappointments, but, on the whole, one may say with absolute confidence that the means employed have more than justified the ends attained, and that, in other words, the important changes wrought have effected such radical

improvements in our social status as to have more than warranted the strenuous activities that had to be undertaken.

When we contemplate, even in the most casual fashion, the standard of life that was generally available to non-seeing people in the latter part of the last century and contrast the facilities then existing with the conditions prevailing to-day, we have much to be grateful for, and even more to admire in the attitude and character of those early pioneers, who, with much labour and self-sacrifice, laid the foundation stone of the edifice which we are now striving to erect.

Elsewhere I have said that every modern achievement which we appreciate and value has only been made possible because of the steady, constructive and permanent work performed on our behalf by those generous souls who, in the past, were inspired in all their undertakings by the sole desire to succour and help the needy and the handicapped in the struggle for existence. We are too apt to think that the changes we have experienced in our own time are, of necessity, the result of political agitation, whereas, if we but reflect for a moment, we cannot fail to discern the fact that even the organised efforts we have been privileged to make were only rendered possible because of the facilities that had heretofore been provided by the voluntary system.

If we are not exceedingly careful, however, it seems to the writer that we are in great danger of forgetting all these inestimable services, and so directing our energies and activities as to demand from the State and the Municipalities such aid in the form of cash services as will inevitably destroy our initiative and undermine self-reliance without

which non-seeing people as a community must ultimately degenerate into paupers and beggars. On the face of it, this seems an exceedingly harsh statement and certainly demands an explanation. The point of view of the writer in this connection, however, is clear and definite, for, if the State, by undue interference and elaborate machinery, seeks to do for the individual the things which he is capable of undertaking on his own behalf, it is inevitable that personal initiative must be stifled and the desire to strive for rational and natural attainments will cease.

State assistance, so long as it is wisely directed and inspired by the definite purpose of opening up new vistas and possibilities, will continue to have a value which cannot be gauged by mere financial considerations; but so soon as it enters into the domain of individual responsibility and seeks to take away the motive-power of rational emulation, then the action of the central authority is retrogressive, and we are justified in resisting its impulses and its activities by every legitimate means with which we are endowed.

In the following pages, it is proposed to discuss various aspects of welfare work on behalf of the blind, and to indicate a precise point of view and an attitude that should be adopted by all genuine reformers towards these complicated and difficult problems. The author will strive to impress upon his readers that the legitimate functions of the State and the Municipalities are best exercised when they seek to provide reasonable facilities for the education, employment and maintenance of the blind in return for the services which we can give, in proportion to our ability, to the community of which we are a part.

It is being assumed by a certain school of thought that handicapped people possess rights and privileges which they are entitled to impose upon the community without limitations, and the viewpoint is being inculcated that a high standard of life should be available regardless of the contribution made by the individual enjoying that standard. To such an attitude the writer cannot subscribe, and the pages of this book will seek to justify the opposition he must maintain towards this pseudo-philosophy.

During the progress of this little work reference must frequently be made to the Blind Persons Act, 1920, for upon that statutory provision rest all the progressive activities that have been so eminently successful during the last few years. In the enactment to which I have referred we have rational provision and wise direction, and it is because of these inestimable qualities that progressive effort has been possible. Moreover, the enactment has wisely sought to preserve the continuity of the voluntary system, assigning to it a definite place in the scheme of things. The organisation which I may here describe as the three-fold partnership, viz., the co-operation of the State, the County and County Borough Authorities, and the voluntary agencies, has so arranged its activities as to be mutually helpful, and thus be, for all practical purposes, complementary.

Thus I am justified in claiming that the Blind Persons Act, representing, as it does, the first set of legislative proposals designed to meet the needs of non-seeing people in matters educational and industrial, constitutes a charter from which our economic freedom may be said to be born.

Exceptional blind men and women in every age have distinguished themselves in art, science and literature, but it was not until 1920 that an opportunity was provided for every such handicapped person to win for himself a place in society by the exercise of his own initiative and capacity.

Heretofore, the Poor Law system had made some provision for destitute blind persons, and the Act to which reference is here made simply regularises that provision, and enables a competent County or County Borough Authority to provide more liberally for a class of persons who, whilst not being absolutely destitute, still require a substantial measure of public assistance.

The various aspects of this problem will be dealt with in later chapters of "The British Blind," but, in the meantime, it is perhaps necessary to emphasise yet again the important consideration that blindness, though a severe handicap, can be and is being minimised by reason of the greater facilities that are now available enabling courageous men and women to look upon philanthropy, not as a mainstay of their existence, but merely as an agency to be welcomed and appreciated wherever its assistance is required. Its value should always be relative, and subordinated in such a way as to give scope for the exercise of those potentialities which education and training can develop and express. The State may provide liberal grants of money, the Local Authorities may be ever so munificent: if the opportunity is lacking to the individual by which he may live an industrious and useful life, mere monetary considerations will not compensate him for the priceless heritage he has lost. So, to whatever degree the State may feel disposed to go in the future, unless individual interests and inclinations

are protected, the Utopia conceived by the idealist may well degenerate into one of the most undesirable conditions of existence.

Liberty of thought and action is only possible where men are able to exercise their powers of initiative in order to wrest from nature and circumstance the means by which they can subsist. If they are deprived of those opportunities, retrogression and ultimate extinction is assured.

As a result of incalculable painstaking and self-sacrifice, the blind community has been raised from a condition of absolute dependence upon others to a state of society in which they can exercise every remaining faculty, not merely for their own comfort and convenience, but generally for the advancement of the race. It would be deplorable if, by another route, through excessive coddling and grandmotherly care, the process of degeneration were to set in, and these priceless opportunities were frittered away because of an attachment to a misconceived and false idealism. This is the great danger lurking ahead to which intelligent resistance must be organised.

CHAPTER II.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE
BLIND PERSONS' ACT, 1920.

"It is generally the idle who complain that they cannot find time to do that which they fancy they wish. In truth, people can generally find time for what they choose to do: it is not really the time but the will that is wanting; and the advantage of leisure is mainly that we have the power of choosing our own work; not certainly that it confers any privilege of idleness."

—LORD LUBBOCK.

IT was Goulburn who said that "We shall never know what it is to live in peace, until we know what it is to live thoroughly in the present. We need all our energies for the fulfilment of present duties." There are many exceedingly unwise people who appear to have imbibed a philosophy which suggests that they have no concern whatever with the present, and that pressing duties and obligations can be lightly disregarded so long as they exhibit an attitude of intense concern for the future. It is this error of judgment which in a large measure is responsible for much of the nonsense to which we are so often treated in discussions on the society of the future, and it is probable that nowhere more than in the circles associated with work on behalf of non-seeing people is this attitude more frequently implied or expressed.

So long as the records of social and industrial history can be pressed into the service of mankind, so long will the year 1920 be memorable to all who are or may be interested in the welfare of the blind.

In a special sense, the past eight years have not merely been a testing time, but, in a large degree, the period has been one of experimentation. The least optimistic critic, with the facts before him, must admit that infinitely greater achievements have been realised than could have been thought possible from the simple statutory enactment of September, 1920.

It was perhaps in the very nature of things that we should look rather suspiciously upon what appeared to be the very meagre provisions set forth in this short enactment. With much foreboding then, and not a little suspicion, we took up the task of administration with little enthusiasm for the job. Experience has demonstrated to all but a very small number that more things have been accomplished in Britain than were ever dreamed of in our philosophy, and it can be now affirmed unreservedly that this simple enactment has entirely changed not merely the atmosphere in which we previously had to work; but our conception of duties and responsibilities has undergone a fundamental change, and that, be it said, to the exclusive advantage of the blind community. Occasionally we learn of spasmodic attempts that are made in certain directions to secure so-called amending proposals; but these efforts will continue to prove abortive, for the ideas upon which the suggested changes are based are usually such as are possible of accomplishment in the present state of the law, or else they seek to impose conditions that are entirely at variance with the theory and practice of economic law.

We are not justified then in anticipating any drastic change in the provisions of the Blind Persons Act for a very long time. Its administrative qualities will continue to improve, and still greater use will be made of its most elastic machin-

ery: having regard, however, to the great potentialities of the measure, Parliament can be much better employed legislatively than by interfering with the rational and normal development of the conditions envisaged by present statutory sanctions.

I have repeatedly stated that there is nothing of material importance that is required for the well-being of the blind community which cannot be secured under the present enactment so long as we can convince the County or County Borough authorities that such changes are reasonable and essential, and I see no justification for altering or amending that view.

Those who are continually avowing their faith in democratic forms of government cannot surely dissent from one of the first principles which must continue to guide and control all representative institutions, namely, that those deputed to act on behalf of the people must satisfy themselves that all forms of taxation are levied by the consent of the body politic acting through properly accredited agents, such consent being either expressly stated or implied. The absence of these mutual understandings and conceptions would mean the end of all forms of representative government, and, consequently, the destruction of all legislative and administrative machinery.

Certain people are much too apt to think that their own little concerns are of such paramount importance as to completely obscure all other interests and issues. They talk as though their own very small problems are of greater magnitude and importance than matters of deep concern which affect great masses of wealth producers. They would, in fact, have us believe that a part is greater than the whole.

The blind man represents but one unit in proportion to 911 of the population; so that, when we are called to examine the claims which other sections of society have upon the generosity of the community, we are not justified in pressing our demands beyond premises that may properly be regarded as equitable.

It has been computed that all forms of benevolent work in this country attract to themselves about £32,000,000 annually; and, when we remember the thousands of praiseworthy objects for the sustenance of which money is needed, it is not unreasonable to say that the blind community obtains a very fair proportion of the available funds.

Subsequently it is proposed to show in detail what has been accomplished during the past eight years, and to examine the expenditure that has been incurred in fostering those essential services which are conferring tremendous advantages upon the blind community.

In proceeding to ascertain the extent to which progress has been made during the period under review, it will be as well to apply certain infallible tests in order that the results of our previously-expressed opinions may thereby be properly confirmed.

The Blind Persons Act was the first decisive step taken legally to deal constructively with the claims of the adult blind. Prior to the year 1920 the Poor Law laid it down quite clearly that relief in various forms could be granted, and the expenditure undertaken by the authorities was generally liberal, and, most frequently, wisely bestowed. Were we criticising such arrangements, we would say that far too much money was expended in those days upon unproductive relief and far too little upon

what may properly be described as constructive expenditure designed to have a definite economic result.

Despite these apparent weaknesses, however, the agency of the Poor Law as applied to the adult blind was not unkindly bestowed, though the incidence of its administration was oftentimes weak and ineffective. Some of these authorities—notably, the Bradford Board of Guardians—were conspicuously generous in the arrangements made for assisting the blind, a position which they have well maintained to the present day. Special legislation was necessary, however, not merely to regularise certain practices that were common to some local authorities, but also to give definite legal sanction for the continuity of those practices, and generally to confer additional powers upon County and County Boroughs so that they might deal in a comprehensive and scientific way with the needs of all blind persons under their care.

In England and Wales there are 146 County and County Borough authorities upon whom these responsibilities devolve, and a sufficiently lengthy testing period has elapsed since the passing of the Blind Persons Act to enable us to judge impartially of the merits of the legislative sanctions entrusted to them.

We learn with interest that during the financial years 1921 to 1927 inclusive, the following grants in aid have been paid by the Ministry of Health: £69,886; £75,445; £83,470; £94,970; £103,994, and £112,510. These figures are exclusive of the sums expended in the provision of State pensions under Section I of the Act, and in this connection the following table will doubtless be of interest:—

Date.		Number of Blind persons in receipt of Pension.	Amount of Annual Grant.
March 31st, 1921	.....	7,826	£180,000
„ 1922	.....	9,107	£225,000
„ 1923	.....	9,921	£250,000
„ 1924	.....	10,625	£265,000
„ 1925	.....	12,024	£300,000
„ 1926	.....	13,663	£340,000
„ 1927	.....	14,563	£364,000

If we turn for a moment to the expenditure incurred by local authorities on definite services to the blind community, the figures are not less instructive :—

1921-2	1922-3	1923-4	1924-5
£	£	£	£
14,671	47,106	71,805	102,910
	1925-6	1926-7	
	£	£	
	135,946	173,828	

It is obvious, however, that the expenditure for 1928 as undertaken by local authorities will show a very considerable increase by reason of the fact that arrangements made by County and County Borough authorities for dealing with unemployable blind persons have now become general, which means that the aforesaid authorities are incurring expenditure out of all proportion to liabilities previously accepted.

The writer has made a rough calculation of our national expenditure on all these services since 1921. It is not claimed that the figures are absolutely correct, but care has been exercised in submitting only such data as can be vouched for; it is certain that the figures, if anything, are understated. It must be borne in mind also that they

include the following items and exclude the amounts expended on Poor Law Relief for which no reliable evidence is at present available:—Grants made by the Ministry of Health; grants expended by County and County Borough authorities; Board of Education expenditure and the administration of voluntary contributions, together with the State pensions and other annuities.

It is suggested that the various agencies enumerated above in 1921 expended approximately £510,000; 1922, £593,000; 1923, £647,000; 1924, £720,000; 1925, £783,000; 1926, £832,000, and in 1927, £920,000.

By courtesy of the Board of Education the writer is enabled to publish the following figures, which will throw some light on the work that is being undertaken educationally by the expenditure involved in 1926. It must be understood, also, that so far as the figures relate to the expenditure of local education authorities, they are approximate estimates only.

<i>Elementary Education.</i>	£
Board of Education expenditure by way of grants to voluntarily provided schools	1,609
Estimated expenditure of local education authorities on provision for blind children	177,000
<i>Higher Education (Training of Blind in vocational courses).</i>	
Board of Education expenditure by way of grants to voluntary institutions providing recognised courses	3,857
Estimated expenditure of local education authorities on provision made	63,000

Higher Education (Secondary School).

Board of Education's grant to

Worcester College 1,025

It will be conceded generally then that within recent years we have registered a degree of progress in welfare work on behalf of the blind which is almost inconceivable having regard to the severity of the economic depression through which the country has been passing. Whatever the critics may say to the contrary, the Blind Persons Act of 1920 is a landmark in our historical development which will continue to exercise a beneficent influence when all the unseemly jibes and misrepresentations will have been buried in the limbo of obscurity. If we use our privileges rightly, this simple Act of Parliament will prove to have been the keystone of our industrial freedom, and the intellectual liberty which we ought to prize most highly will thereby have been made possible for all who would enter the Promised Land.

CHAPTER III.

INDUSTRIAL METHODS AND
CONDITIONS EXAMINED.

"The bad workmen, who form the majority of the operatives in many branches of industry, are decidedly of opinion that bad workmen ought to receive the same wages as good."

—JOHN STUART MILL.

BEFORE proceeding to discuss in detail the the newly-created facilities for the employment of an additional number of blind persons, and before venturing to supply detailed information regarding the extension of already existing facilities, it is very desirable that we should attempt to discuss briefly some of the fundamental difficulties associated with methods of remuneration.

Professor Edwin Cannan in the introduction to his admirable book on wealth, dealing with certain economic fallacies, says that the fact that professional economists are as disinclined to publish a refutation as the Astronomer Royal is to answer the theorists who declare that the world is flat, is taken by some people as an evidence that their theories and conclusions are substantially true. Professor Cannan goes on to say: "it is not refutation of ridiculous suggestions which is required, but their non-appearance in consequence of there being no possibility of their gaining acceptance in minds already occupied by a knowledge of the actual nature and working of the economic machine."

It would appear that a certain school of thought has determined that their propaganda should be so directed as to instil in the minds of the public the conception that the remuneration paid to all sightless artisans shall be based upon what is described as the minimum wage. I have pointed out repeatedly that considerable confusion exists in the minds of these people as to what constitutes wage payments. There is no necessity here to enter upon abstruse definitions of economic terms, for it will be generally agreed that a wage, in the accepted sense, is that quantity of wealth production which is the agreed amount to be appropriated to the exclusive use of the worker, whether his labour be expressed in manual dexterity or mental power. It will be readily understood, therefore, that such a definition is not the one comprehended by votaries of the school of thought to which we have alluded, and therefore such a definition will, of course, be at once rejected.

Mr. Ian D. Colvin has rightly observed:—
“Catchwords are to the politician what his clubs are to the golfer. With half a dozen of different shapes and sizes he can get round any course and out of every bunker.”

So far as one is able to judge, the idea seems to have gained currency that a man or woman, because he or she may be labouring under some severe disability or limitation, has a right to call upon the State, the municipalities, or the voluntary agencies to make good any deficiency which real economic power fails to supply. This is a theory which we are bound to examine in detail. It would be sheer stupidity to dismiss it with a mere negative reply, because the notion, however ill-founded it may be, is deeply rooted in the minds of many

people, and merely to repudiate the contention without advancing valid reasons for the rejection, would be simply to follow the bad example of those who are responsible for foisting the idea upon the community. The blind worker, like every other worker, is entitled to receive the due recognition of the services he performs on behalf of the community. It makes no difference whatever as to whether he is the employee of a private firm or whether he be a Civil servant. The assessment of his capacity is determined by certain economic laws which, though subject to change, are nevertheless only influenced by the conditions that prevail in every allied industry or occupation; and when we proceed to examine the foundation upon which the principle of the minimum wage rests, we must first recognise that, in the economic sense, the difficulties confronting us are very real. Every person familiar with industrial conditions recognises that when we speak of establishing a minimum wage we are in fact agreed that a certain ascertainment of labour value has been made, and that labour value has been assessed in such a way as to represent the earning capacity of the average worker engaged in the industry. The employee brings to his task 100 per cent. of capacity, and in return receives in cash values the equivalent, or at least such an amount as the industry is adjudged to be capable of bearing. Therefore, the minimum wage, as such, is scientifically conceived, and is the agreed equivalent of definite services. By no stretch of imagination can you apply such a test to the labour of the blind. Every calculation you make must be based upon the assumption that you are dealing with persons whose assessment of disability must be placed at a very high level, and whose productive capacity ac-

cordingly is correspondingly low : so that, in point of fact, your so-called minimum wage is not, in the economic sense, a wage at all. It is a weekly allowance made to certain individuals and conditioned by the fact that they must render some service, or that they must produce a certain number of commodities. We do not even stipulate that the maximum amount of production shall be given ; though this condition is implied or understood, unfortunately it is seldom realised. If we proceeded to fix a minimum wage on the same basis as that generally obtaining in industry, the position of the blind worker would be very serious indeed ; but the State, the municipalities and voluntary agencies have long ago recognised the impossibility of applying such a theory, and have sought to devise practical means by which the standard of life of the average artisan can be appreciably improved. As yet, no ideal system has been evolved. We are, as it were, feeling our way to a conception that will be equitable in its incidence and application, and at the same time provide sufficient scope and incentive to enable the blind worker to give of his best both in quality and production. To urge that every worker, regardless of the quality or quantity of his work, shall receive an equal amount of remuneration, is the greatest piece of unmitigated nonsense ever foisted upon a community, unless it be that community of which Emerson speaks in one of his essays. The story is perhaps worth repeating.

In effect Emerson says : " When I was a young man I joined an American Commune where we had ' all things in common except common sense.' "

Outside the theories and conclusions of the Communistic State, I cannot conceive any intelligent man or woman, no matter what their limitations

may be, claiming that they have a right to demand from the State greater service than that for which they are capable of providing an equivalent. Whenever one ventures, therefore, to approach matters closely relating to the provision of employment facilities, or the allied subject of methods of remuneration, it is frequently urged that there is a want of sympathy unless one can unreservedly give support to the theories and conclusions of the school of thought to which reference has already been made. Surely it is possible to view these matters from a common-sense angle without being unsympathetic. The resources of the community are not inexhaustible, and every impost in the form of taxation levied for the continuity of social service means, in effect, a tax upon the labour of the competent and the fit. We have a right, surely, to ask how far we are justified in attempting to force the pace in matters of this kind. It may seem a small thing to some people that the rates of the County of London should have to bear this year approximately an increase of £10,000 for services rendered to the blind community; but are we not justified in asking ourselves, do we possess a claim upon the community that is greater than could be preferred by some other handicapped people? If it be conceded that we do, then the community must sooner or later determine the limit beyond which we have no right to travel, and some day it will be the business of an intelligent State to demand that the maximum of service shall be available for the standard of life conceded to us.

I desire here to make some observations on certain phases of public control, which, after all, may be regarded as a new development in matters pertaining to the welfare of the blind.

In these difficult days, when it is essential for every commercial project to be ruthlessly scrutinised with a view to reducing production costs to a minimum, it is reasonable to suggest that workshops for the employment of the blind cannot wholly expect to be altogether immune from such an examination. For a long time experts have been much concerned about the high costs that appear to be incidental to this form of employment. Oftentimes these costs appear to bear no reasonable ratio to the wages paid, whilst at the same time trade losses in recent years have soared to alarming proportions. It would be well for all concerned if without Government intervention we were to make a serious effort to set these things right, or at least to know that they are incapable of being remedied; for, if the latter view were to be upheld, most certainly we would have to look in other directions for means by which the available labour of the blind worker could be absorbed more economically.

If we maintain an attitude of stolid indifference towards these urgently pressing problems, complete public control will come to us in its least desirable form, and much of the good work accomplished by the voluntary organisations will be permanently retarded. As we are rapidly approaching the time when County and County Borough authorities will assume a larger measure of control and direction in welfare work on behalf of the blind, such a scrutiny becomes both desirable and necessary; for, if our undertakings are to continue along progressive lines, it will be essential to demonstrate more and more that with certain properly-defined reservations our industrial establishments can meet the exigencies of reasonable competition.

In other words, establishment charges, economic earnings, and all other production costs will be required to bear proper comparison with other business enterprises, and we shall be obliged to show that they do not compete unfavourably with those who pay rates and taxes and whose daily bread is derived in innumerable instances from the same occupations as those practised by the blind.

If the voluntary organisations wish to maintain a reasonable measure of local autonomy and to enjoy the liberty they have so far exercised, it must be demonstrated that the best possible use is being made of the resources at their disposal; and, if this can be proven, neither the central Government nor the local authorities will be anxious to assume greater responsibilities.

Generally speaking, the managers of our special workshops are not unmindful of these considerations, and I have good reason to know that some of them are very apprehensive of the results that may accrue if a very strenuous effort is not made in the near future to order our affairs in a better way.

Mill in his essay on Liberty reminds us that "the fatal tendency of mankind to leave off thinking about a thing, when it is no longer doubtful, is the cause of half their errors." Blind workers, who in the final analysis are most intimately concerned, or should be, appear to have given no very serious attention to the matter, and are quite oblivious of the fact that Government control in any form means a greater limitation of their individual freedom. They seem to think that if and when municipal control is secured, a substantial basic wage will necessarily be obtained, and that irrespective of their ability to earn such. They are apparently oblivious of the fact that the ordinary ratepayer

must needs be consulted before such imposts can be entertained.

Those who labour under such a delusion will receive a rude awakening, and their sojourn in a fool's paradise will be short-lived. It seems to have been forgotten that those who are to-day in the service of County or County Borough authorities are able to bring to the execution of their respective tasks 100 per cent. of capacity; and, be it remembered, it is this consideration which alone determines the basic or minimum rate of wage payments. To expect that similar conditions will be granted to non-seeing workers irrespective of efficiency or output is unthinkable, and certainly will never be conceded by business men.

We are continually urging our friends to believe that we do not wish to be the recipients of charity; and, if we are taken at our own valuation, who can be surprised? Surely, we are not so stupid as to contend that we really do not mean all we say, and that there is no justification whatever for the imposition of an efficiency and productivity standard? It is my considered opinion, after much anxious thought, and with a full sense of responsibility for the view enunciated, that our right to substantial remuneration must rest almost entirely on the ability we display in the craft, business or profession in which for the time being we may be engaged. It would automatically follow, with a full measure of public control, that we would be required to subscribe to such a test. Those who for any reason fell short of the standard would probably be treated in special relief categories or encouraged to find employment in other spheres of work, the important point at issue being that they would not be given

liberal remuneration without proper regard being paid to their economic capacity.

It is all too frequently forgotten that present conditions have been secured as a result of the spontaneous goodwill of the community; compulsion to give has been entirely lacking. But when other conditions are brought to bear and it is understood that this freedom of choice has disappeared, it is obvious that the public will be much more critical and far more vigilant in respect of the expenditure which they are required to provide.

When we are called upon to discuss employment facilities in relation to production costs, there is always a disposition to treat the trading organisation as an integral part of a philanthropic enterprise, and these loose methods have produced a good deal of misapprehension as to the true function of these trading concerns. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that charity and business must be entirely separated if we are to appraise at their proper value the definite functions of such undertakings. Those charged with the responsibility of workshop management have been seriously at fault in the past and they are much to blame to-day for the unseemly and unwarrantable competition into which they enter with each other. It is no uncommon thing to find four or five trading organisations for the blind in a very limited area strenuously competing with each other for business. They apparently are so absorbed in their own little concerns as to be utterly indifferent to the interests of their neighbours who are making efforts for the advancement of the same class of individuals. Had they taken a lesson from the big multiple firms they would have learned long ago that co-operation was the very life-blood of their existence, and that the

promotion of central buying and selling agencies is the only sûre and certain way of eliminating waste, and reducing overhead charges to a minimum. The most hopeful feature of the present situation, however, is to be found in the fact that an intelligent interest in these matters is expressing itself in the various administrations, and, therefore, we have reason to be optimistic towards the future.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON PRODUCTION COSTS.

"The good business man must ever be concerned with the important task of supervising production costs, for he knows that unless his raw material is purchased under favourable conditions every subsequent process in the progress and development of his undertaking must necessarily suffer. He knows that if the foundation of his business is wrong, sooner or later, the superstructure must fall."

MAY I be permitted to make yet again another brief reference to the vexed problem of production costs and the allied and interdependent subject of wage conditions. Many people appear to think that the cost of production is no business of theirs. It does not seem to occur to them that the improper use of material, or the wastage of the same, bears any relationship to wages, but surely this conception is due either to ignorance or to callous indifference as to the responsibilities which legitimately devolve upon them. The fact that one is employed by a charitable institution surely implies that the very best possible use should be made of opportunities for service; also, in the interests of the public, we should be able to feel and say that we are economical in the utilisation of the means at our disposal, and that we husband our resources in such a manner as to provide for unforeseen contingencies.

In the final analysis all economic earnings are based upon cost of production. If those costs soar unduly high, then it necessarily follows that wages

must remain low, but if by any chance the initial costs are heavy and wages unduly high, then bankruptcy and ruin are inevitably the concomitant results.

It will be seen then that it is essentially the intimate business and concern of the blind worker to make his contribution in no stinted manner towards the reduction of the primary costs to which I have referred; but, of course, his service, valuable as it is, cannot alone achieve the purposes we have in view. It is the business of the employer to see that the raw material is not only good in quality, but that it is purchased in the best markets and that without the intervention of the middleman who invariably takes such a toll for his services as to cripple industry in its very inception. Experience has taught me to regard this contention as one of primary importance. Although the system of paying liberal commissions is fast disappearing from the arena of the commercial enterprises in which we are engaged, I fear it has not yet been entirely eliminated.

It has been said with much truth on many previous occasions that if we are to maintain a status in those industries that are generally practised by the blind, it is incumbent upon us to inculcate a wider conception of the principle of co-operation among our trading agencies. All over the country we have comparatively small organisations purchasing in a hand-to-mouth fashion the quantities of raw material required for their purposes; and, of course, such purchases are made under conditions where economic buying is absolutely impossible, the result of this process being that production costs are swollen to such an extent as to deprive the organisations involved of any semblance of a chance of competing with other manufacturers on anything like equal terms.

We are living in days when large aggregations of capital, by reason of the possession of substantial purchasing power, can enter the competitive market under most advantageous conditions, and the time has arrived when our voluntary agencies should take this wholesome lesson to heart unless they intend to be ruthlessly forced outside the region of practical business.

Within recent years no very serious effort has been made to bring together these trading interests with a view to ascertaining the degree to which the co-operation of which I have spoken may be possible, and this is a situation much to be deplored; for, if common business interests can pool their resources for the purchasing of raw material, surely, in the name of all that is reasonable, those organisations that are inspired by altruistic motives should not be less disposed to trust each other.

It is not intended here in the slightest degree to minimise the difficulties that will have to be overcome before co-operative buying and selling can be made an integral part of our system of trading, but these difficulties can never be surmounted by an attitude of supine indifference such as is to-day exhibited towards this pressing problem. Some one has said with much truth that "difficulties only exist to be overcome," and it is futile to profess to be appalled by the magnitude of the task and to allow the old bad system to continue without a single effort of a reformatory character being undertaken.

In another chapter dealing with the provision of employment facilities, these points are again stressed because of their intrinsic value and relevancy.

To provide employment for the blind is to many agencies the sole justification for their existence; it is the life-blood of all constructive effort, and with-

out it we would inevitably relapse into a condition which characterised bygone centuries. This would be the death-knell of all progressive effort, and represents an unthinkable proposition.

It is of little use blaming the manual worker for an irreconcilable attitude towards the employment agencies, if these authorities show themselves to be unmindful of commonly-accepted economic theory and practice by failing so to organise their resources as to eliminate all superfluous forms of expenditure and waste.

Of late, one has heard much discussion on the desirability of convening national conferences; but the solution of urgently-pressing problems is rarely found in these great conclaves. What we need at the present time is a greater concentration upon definitely-ascertained weaknesses, and a constructive effort to eliminate such by those who are experienced in negotiating complicated and delicate situations. If those authorities interested in industrial organisation and employment would come together with a determination to escape from the present *impasse* by entering upon an era of mutual co-operation in the purchasing of raw material and the marketing of finished goods, they would thereby have made a practical contribution to welfare work on behalf of the blind such as no ordinary annual conference could ever emulate.

I have dwelt at length on these matters because in the stress and strain of commercial life as we know it to-day there is real danger, it seems to me, of our industries continuing to be the Cinderella occupations which have heretofore been the lot of the blind worker. I venture to think that a different conception is dawning upon us, and that the old idea of forcing people to weave coir yarn, to fashion brushes or construct various articles in basketry,

shall not henceforth be the Alpha and Omega of our existence. In the better days that are coming to us, taste, capacity and the desire to serve will be the dominant keynote of our lives, and to fashion such a system is a superb privilege and opportunity conferred upon us which is seldom vouchsafed to mortal men.

It will already have been concluded that in my opinion it would be difficult, if not quite impossible, to exaggerate the importance of forever being on the *qui vive* where costs of production are concerned. It is vital to the safe conduct of every business, and this is the testimony of every man of affairs whose views command universal respect. That nearly 75 per cent. of the waste in production is due to bad management was the contention of Mr. Edward A. Filene, an eminent Boston, U.S.A. business man, speaking at a gathering in London recently. It was customary, he said, for the blame for bad business to be put on labour. Every business man who was dissatisfied with the costs of production should examine carefully the management side of his business. Mr. Seeböhm Rowntree says it is vitally important in this country that the efficiency of our industrial methods should be raised to the highest possible point. It was also important that wages should be raised, because higher wages meant a higher purchasing power.

Earlier in this chapter I entered upon a brief discussion of the conditions by which these costs are adversely influenced; it is not claimed, however, that this examination is in any sense exhaustive, for there are many important contributory factors which are altogether ignored, or only referred to in quite a casual manner—for example, such aspects of the problem as the purchase of the best raw material and

the proper storage and preparation of the same, the many causes of waste, and a closer observation on the weight of the finished product, etc. All the items here enumerated play an important part in influencing the cost of production in workshops for the blind. I am not unmindful, either, of the supervision charges which are invariably heavy, though it would be difficult to see how they can be seriously curtailed under existing conditions. Nevertheless, the matter is one which should be periodically examined in order that the management may be assured that the industry is not being made to carry burdens that cannot be justified.

It would appear that the losses which are being sustained are incurred largely by the complicated processes of marketing the finished products, and it is probably this aspect of the business to which far closer attention should be paid.

Commercial men are often known to complain of the methods employed by our trading agencies; they fear that subscriptions are used to subsidise business, and that legitimate competition is thereby strained to breaking-point by those concerns which need not seriously consider the selling prices of the goods they have to offer because they are relying upon a substantial subscription list or a Government grant to relieve them of financial embarrassments.

It is most unfortunate that there should be even a semblance of truth in these suggestions; but when one examines the present situation with the sole desire of discovering the actual facts, the results are, to say the least of it, very disconcerting. In the years 1924-5, a number of trading institutions received in Government grants the sum of £29,000. During the same period these said institutions lost by trading £38,000. Now, it may be that a perfectly legitimate explanation can be given for this state of

things, but so far it has not been seriously attempted.

If evidence resulting from a properly conducted and comprehensive enquiry should make it clear that such losses are inevitable, then we must perforce immediately take such steps as are necessary to discover more suitable occupations for the blind, and we must strive more zealously than heretofore to make more practical use of the ordinary avenues of industry for the fulfilment of our purposes. Later, I propose to deal with this aspect of the problem more thoroughly; but in the meantime one cannot but regret the seeming apathy which is evinced towards the development of a system of trading which it seems to me is neither intelligible nor defensible.

If it be true, as I have stated, that there are some phases of our work that cannot be said to be entirely satisfactory, there is, nevertheless, much in the present situation for which we ought to be intensely grateful. So far as the blind worker is concerned, it is perfectly true to say that the standard of remuneration by which his services are recognised was never better than it is to-day. Economic earnings (save in a few places) are distinctly improving, whilst the principle by which wages are augmented has now become an established condition of our social system recognised by all the employment agencies.

It must not be inferred from these observations that I am contending in consequence of this appreciable progress that one should be entirely satisfied simply to maintain the *status quo*. Such a conception would be ludicrous; for, though finality must and will be reached in the near future in the matter of providing grants of money for the purpose of augmenting wages, there should be no artificial barriers set up by employment agencies to prevent non-seeing workers earning unlimited wages by

manufacturing saleable commodities. Indeed, the ideal for which we should strive is surely to evolve, adapt or appropriate to ourselves such occupations as may be practised in free competition with others, such pursuits as will yield adequate remuneration, thereby obviating subsidies or disability allowances. That conception is impracticable for the moment, and it will continue to be impracticable so long as we set our hearts and minds upon the acquisition of subsidies rather than inculcating a spirit of self-reliance and efficiency in production. These limitations will continue so long as we are prepared to regard present occupations as representing the final stages in our industrial development.

Though one is sometimes tempted to assume an attitude of impatience and even to manifest downright hostility towards the scheme of things when it is observed how slowly the wheels of progress appear to move, yet, if we could but take a little time to reflect upon the changes that have taken place during our own short experiences, I venture to think we would find more reason for congratulation than otherwise.

I am told by a correspondent that I am missing a magnificent opportunity in refraining to advocate what is known as a "living wage" for all blind workers. I am most certainly desirous of seeing every worker enjoying a standard of life such as to place him well above the poverty-line. Yes, and I would rejoice to see him become possessed of very much more than that standard; but wages are determined by economic considerations, not by wishes or good intentions. Such wage as one is able to earn constitutes a measure of service to the community, and all additions made to this remuneration are, in point of fact, subtracted from the labour

values of others who are also striving to reach a higher standard of life.

If it be true that labour used in its all-inclusive sense is the "source of all wealth," then the only scientific claim we possess to the standard of which my friends speak is determined by that general degree of efficiency which we bring to the performance of our daily tasks.

Pope Leo XIII, defining a living wage, stated that it meant "sufficient to support a frugal and steady workman." "For," said the Pope, "if the workman, compelled by his needs or influenced by fear of worse evils, agrees to harder terms (which he must unwillingly accept because the master so insists), he becomes the victim of force that justice condemns."

Though the foregoing definition leaves much to be desired, it will be obvious to most thinking people that the effort must be made to create the things that are deemed to be essential; and only in proportion to the value of the exertion we make can we hope to wrest from nature the material things that are necessary for human happiness.

Our attention is frequently directed by politicians to the effect of foreign competition in the sphere of industry with which we are particularly concerned, and most of us have heretofore been reluctant to examine in detail these effects because of our allegiance to one or other of the political parties. I am convinced, however, that if some of these problems could be examined by competent business people in an atmosphere free from party politics, a common-sense attitude would emerge to which most thoughtful people might readily subscribe.

When one reflects that hundreds of men who have been trained in certain industrial occupations, are systematically unemployed, and that the products

which they are capable of making are being imported into the country in ever-increasing quantities, one cannot help but feel that there must be something fundamentally wrong in our business organisations and relationships which tolerates with apparent equanimity such a state of things. At the moment I am thinking of the basket-making industry, and the following facts afford a significant commentary on the present situation. It would appear that information relative to the cultivation of osiers and willows in England and Wales is only obtained at very irregular intervals, and figures for a succession of years are not, therefore, available. The last occasion on which this information was obtained was in 1925 in connection with the Census of Production taken in that year, when the total area of osiers and willows was estimated at 6,000 acres, of which over 50 per cent. was in the eight counties of Somerset, Dorset, Gloucester, Nottingham, Stafford, Lancashire, Berkshire and Suffolk. Very few osiers or willows seem to be grown in the extreme north of England or in Wales. About three-fourths of the total area is reported to be cut over almost every year, the produce being used for basket making, or for tying bundles of vegetables for market, etc. The average annual production of this nature is estimated at nearly 14,000 tons. The remainder of the area is cut approximately every seven or eight years, the produce being used in the main for fencing, stakes and hurdle making, and sometimes for crate making, the average annual production being about 2,500 tons.

These estimates do not include the willows which grow in many parts of the country alongside streams, as to which it is practically impossible to obtain information on which an estimate of the production could be based, nor do they include willows

which are used for bat-making and which would not be cut more often than about once in twenty years.

The foregoing observations concern the general cultivation of willows, but if we look for a moment at other facts and figures we are brought into direct contact with some of the terrible realities of the present unemployment problem.

It is not proposed here to do more than merely call attention to this important economic problem, nor is it intended in the slightest degree to aggravate the present situation by the employment of extravagant phraseology. There is, however, a *prima facie* case for enquiry, and that enquiry should not be unduly delayed.

EXTRACT FROM THE ANNUAL STATEMENT OF THE TRADE OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND BRITISH
COUNTRIES, 1922-1927.

	1922.	1923.	1924.	1925.	1926.	1927.
	£	£	£	£	£	
Baskets and Basketware						The returns for 1927 show that £19,835 worth of willows were imported, and basketry, etc., to the value of £402,985 was brought into the country.
Furniture	32,145	33,742	21,961	18,112	18,633	
Other descriptions	395,993	352,818	352,142	386,836	381,726	
Canes and Rattans for basket-making	161,238	124,773	139,522	167,106	132,582	
Willows for basket-making	17,267	17,269	17,880	16,109	22,146	

CHAPTER V.

ARE BLIND WORKERS BEING
EXPLOITED ?

"The man who is forever moving about and nursing his grievances either against his employers or society in general, glibly talking as though he were one of the most exploited of mortals, is usually one of the least independent of citizens and his slothfulness is more often than not the cause of his deplorable economic circumstances."

WHENEVER I have found it to be either expedient or necessary to write about wage conditions or to discuss the subject with friends, I have always contended that the basis of such remuneration should not merely be wisely laid but that it should be conceived in an atmosphere impregnated with sympathy and understanding.

If it has sometimes been deemed prudent to recede from a mental attitude formerly adopted in respect of such matters, I have only felt impelled to take such a course when the facts have been properly ascertained and verified. Had one continued to cling to the old fallacies long after they had been exploded, and obstinately refused to accept the new truth, it would have been necessary to have entirely abandoned one's researches, and thus it would have become impossible to have been of any further service to the reform movement.

I ardently desire to know that all blind workers are obtaining reasonable wages; I want to see a properly authenticated scientific assessment of disability, so that legitimate defects can be properly

compensated; but with all this, I desire also to feel that the workers are endeavouring by increased and sustained effort to justify such procedure. All sensible people wish to feel that the expenditure we are making upon education and training is being justified in the workshop, and that we are tending unreservedly to become more efficient and not less capable or less industrially productive.

When one can be satisfied on these fundamental issues, it will be comparatively easy to go forward with confidence, able and willing to do battle with the forces of reaction; indeed, such opposition would thereby have lost the very reason for its existence.

If the industries in which we are engaged have become so depressed economically that they cannot be made to yield better results, then we must busy ourselves in other directions; but if present conditions are merely occasioned by the outcome of a specious philosophy, or in consequence of a promulgation of a certain set of doctrinal opinions, then the sooner we settle down to honest industry the sooner will we be able to advocate practical and constructive changes.

It is a grievous error to assert that we can secure economic well-being by permitting the wheels of industry merely to rotate at a ca'-canny pace. Communities are never enriched, either spiritually or economically, by the result of such a policy, whilst it cannot fail to be destructive of the *morale* of the individual.

From time to time it has been my unhappy experience to read in certain newspapers and in other propagandist literature, statements to the effect that blind workers in Britain are being sweated and exploited by their employers. These captains of

industry are said to be the officers in charge of workshops for the blind, who are pursuing this wicked policy for the love of gain and personal aggrandisement.

I make no apology for at once describing these statements as a carefully calculated and deliberate piece of untruthful propaganda, maliciously designed to bring discredit upon a body of men who, in spite of tremendous difficulties, are yet striving to give the very best possible conditions to those over whose destinies they are called to preside.

What the wild men hope to achieve by such misrepresentations it is most difficult to understand, for the slightest investigation is certain to reveal the utter futility of their foolish and altogether unwarrantable *canards*.

If their words are intended to convey any meaning whatever, the inference to be drawn from such utterances is surely that the blind are being overworked and underpaid in order that their so-called employers may derive an excessive profit from their labour, or, in some other mysterious way, obtain a lucrative advantage. One might easily retort truthfully to the effect that some of these people who continually make such assertions, never perform work from which any advantage whatever results; and that they are, in point of fact, the only persons of whom it may be truly said that they exist upon the credulity of dupes, who are being taught to strive for the moon, though they have never even travelled so far as the Equator.

There is no necessity whatever to indulge in such misrepresentations, or to circulate untruths for the purpose of making a case; if it were so, nothing but disaster could possibly ensue. A statement of the actual facts will always open up new directions

in which development may be looked for, and finality is for most of us a meaningless expression when applied to material progress.

If I may be permitted to state a simple fact, I am inclined to say that the blind industrial worker in Britain is securing a much larger weekly income than could ever be provided for him if he were merely paid the ordinary rates obtaining in the industry in which he is employed. This contention, therefore, absolutely disposes of the sweating and exploiting theory; but, in order that we may obtain further confirmation of this view, let us look at the matter just a little more closely.

Recently I addressed a questionnaire to most of the workshop authorities in England and Wales on the subject of wage conditions, and replies from 25 of these agencies are before me as I write. Below, therefore, I give the result of my investigations, and must leave it to the reader to say whether I have been able to disprove the statements to which attention is directed in these chapters.

In 1921-22, the number of blind persons employed was 1,573, the total amount of wages and augmentation paid was £140,657 8s. 4d., or an average weekly wage of £1 14s. 3d.

In 1922-23, the number of blind persons employed was 1,730, the total amount of wages and augmentation paid was £143,319 3s. 7d., or an average weekly wage of £1 11s. 10d.

In 1923-24, the number of blind persons employed was 1,804, the total amount of wages and augmentation paid was £146,292 4s. 9d., or an average weekly wage of £1 11s. 2d.

In 1924-25, the number of blind persons employed was 1,878, the total amount of wages and augmentation paid was £156,260 7s. 5d., or an average weekly wage of £1 12s. 0d.

In 1925-26, the number of blind persons employed was 1,937, the total amount of wages and augmentation paid was £166,819 16s. 4d., or an average weekly wage of £1 13s. 1d.

It is only right to observe that some of the larger institutions where the highest wages are being paid have not yet made complete returns, and other institutions where minimum wages obtain are not included in the list so far examined. The general average wage, when full figures are available, will be considerably higher than that revealed in the present statistics.

I think it is made abundantly clear from the foregoing figures that on the whole the industrial worker is being quite fairly treated. I do not suggest that economic earnings and supplementary grants combined are by any means all that is to be desired; but on the other hand, if these men are able to secure proper payment for their actual work, and if, in addition, they are also given considerable weekly subsidies, it is really very difficult to understand how the foolish charges to which I have alluded can find any measure of support.

When the people who invent these stupid *canards* are seriously called to task, they invariably take refuge in a stolid silence. This attitude is maintained for a period, until it is believed their misrepresentations are forgotten; but they are sufficiently audacious to return again to the attack, and perpetrate similar offences. The same sensational paragraphs appear in certain newspapers, and the same virulent poison is disseminated.

It is as certain, however, as anything very well can be, that no cause can hope to succeed permanently if it must draw its inspiration from such an atmosphere of recrimination. To ignore facts, and

mutual interest : such conferences could not fail to produce practical and beneficial results. There are conferences we should all strive to avoid, the mere excursions which resolve themselves into joy rides and which, at the best, become mere talking shops. At all times these expeditions ought to be avoided, but in days of financial stringency they are unpardonable. Obviously, however, there are occasions when, in the common interest, we are required to pool our experiences in order that the most approved methods may be employed in providing a solution of our problems. Southey very appropriately observes :

“ My never-failing friends are they
With whom I converse day by day.
With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.”

It has sometimes been argued, not very convincingly, I think, that it is a matter of very little consequence that there should be a great divergence in the methods and practices obtaining in our industrial institutions, and that the payment of subsidies, varying in amount, is not in itself of great importance; but surely those who contend thus cannot seriously have considered the evils to which such divergences give rise. The justifiable discontent occasioned by such variations is a matter which claims the attention of thoughtful people; for we are bound in honour and equity alike to examine all reasonable causes of friction, and, as far as we can, it is surely right to strive for their removal.

It is proposed, then, briefly to examine the various wage systems prevailing, and also, in the light of ascertained knowledge and experience, to investigate certain untried theories, not necessarily with a view to laying down hard and fast laws, but rather with the intention of promoting a clearer understanding of the many and diverse conditions by which wages in our special institutions are now influenced.

Let it be understood, then, that we must first differentiate as between pure economic terms and phrases employed merely for convenience. It will perhaps be sufficient here to say that the term "wages" is understood to represent the agreed equivalent for some form of service, and that all supplementary allowances, not having an economic basis, are classified as "grants in aid" or "supplements," and it is, therefore, in the relative senses herein indicated that we employ the above-mentioned terms.

It may be objected that our definition of wages does not carry us far enough, and this is at once admitted if it were intended to propound an abstruse economic theory. For the purposes we have in mind, however, the definition will hold good. There is no phrase in the "Dismal Science," that is more common and familiar than the term "wages." The word is the plural of "wage," and would appear to be derived from the old Latin word *wadium*, meaning a pledge; hence the modern construction which implies that the wage is a reward for one's services. It is not unreasonable to assume that the origin of the word and its interpretation as a pledge dates back to the manorial system when tenants in villeinage, whether villeins or cottars, were pledged to plough or to reap, or to do some other agricul-

mutual interest : such conferences could not fail to produce practical and beneficial results. There are conferences we should all strive to avoid, the mere excursions which resolve themselves into joy rides and which, at the best, become mere talking shops. At all times these expeditions ought to be avoided, but in days of financial stringency they are unparadonable. Obviously, however, there are occasions when, in the common interest, we are required to pool our experiences in order that the most approved methods may be employed in providing a solution of our problems. Southey very appropriately observes :

“ My never-failing friends are they
With whom I converse day by day.
With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.”

It has sometimes been argued, not very convincingly, I think, that it is a matter of very little consequence that there should be a great divergence in the methods and practices obtaining in our industrial institutions, and that the payment of subsidies, varying in amount, is not in itself of great importance; but surely those who contend thus cannot seriously have considered the evils to which such divergences give rise. The justifiable discontent occasioned by such variations is a matter which claims the attention of thoughtful people; for we are bound in honour and equity alike to examine all reasonable causes of friction, and, as far as we can, it is surely right to strive for their removal.

It is proposed, then, briefly to examine the various wage systems prevailing, and also, in the light of ascertained knowledge and experience, to investigate certain untried theories, not necessarily with a view to laying down hard and fast laws, but rather with the intention of promoting a clearer understanding of the many and diverse conditions by which wages in our special institutions are now influenced.

Let it be understood, then, that we must first differentiate as between pure economic terms and phrases employed merely for convenience. It will perhaps be sufficient here to say that the term "wages" is understood to represent the agreed equivalent for some form of service, and that all supplementary allowances, not having an economic basis, are classified as "grants in aid" or "supplements," and it is, therefore, in the relative senses herein indicated that we employ the above-mentioned terms.

It may be objected that our definition of wages does not carry us far enough, and this is at once admitted if it were intended to propound an abstruse economic theory. For the purposes we have in mind, however, the definition will hold good. There is no phrase in the "Dismal Science," that is more common and familiar than the term "wages." The word is the plural of "wage," and would appear to be derived from the old Latin word *wadium*, meaning a pledge; hence the modern construction which implies that the wage is a reward for one's services. It is not unreasonable to assume that the origin of the word and its interpretation as a pledge dates back to the manorial system when tenants in villeinage, whether villeins or cottars, were pledged to plough or to reap, or to do some other agricul-

tural work for three or four days in the week, or at fixed times, such as harvest, for the Lord of the Manor as payment in lieu of rent. The simple definition we here employ will, therefore, suffice for our purpose, probably read in conjunction with a modern dictionary explanation. The Oxford dictionary says "A wage is an amount paid periodically, by the day or week or month, for the time during which workman or servant is at employer's disposal." For services rendered, then, the wage is an agreed equivalent, so that whenever we are discussing this problem, it will be understood that all augmentation grants or supplements are extraneous forms of help merely provided because the guaranteed wage is insufficient to secure food, clothing, shelter and the many subsidiary requirements which go to make life tolerable.

CHAPTER VI.

METHODS OF REMUNERATION.

"There is more adventure in the life of the working man, who descends as a common soldier into the battle of life than in that of the millionaire who sits apart in an office, like Von Moltke, and only directs the manœuvres by telegraph. Give me to hear about the career of him who is in the thick of the business; to whom one change of the market means an empty belly and another a copious and savoury meal. This is not the philosophical, but the human side of economics; it interests like a story; and the life of all who are thus situated partakes in a small way of the charm of Robinson Crusoe; for every step is critical, and human life is presented to you naked and verging to its lowest terms."

BEFORE proceeding to discuss the various arrangements under which wage payments and subsidies are provided, it will probably be found most convenient for our purposes to attempt a rough classification of the various methods of remuneration, and where it would appear to be either expedient or necessary, to draw such conclusions or make such other observations as the prevailing circumstances may seem to warrant.

In an analysis of these conditions, it will generally be found necessary in the processes of inductive and deductive reasoning to which recourse must be had, to allow sufficient latitude for the free exercise of those basic appeals to sentiment which so often tend to sweeten life and prevent mankind from degenerating into mere pieces of soulless mechanism.

It must be borne in mind, however, that whilst one may legitimately give play to those humanitarian impulses and instincts, it is equally important to maintain such a rigid hold upon fundamental facts as to preserve that mental equilibrium without which no reliable judgment can be formed and no sound policy enunciated.

Before venturing upon the rough analysis of which I have already spoken, it will perhaps not be out of place to make yet another brief reference to the thorny topic of "the minimum wage."

It is quite apparent from correspondence which I have received from time to time, that previous references I have made to the subject have been misunderstood, and before proceeding further it will be as well to attempt to clarify the situation.

Most people will be found willing to concede the point that the appeal for such a wage condition is primarily a sentimental consideration which may have but the very remotest association with economic fact. The connection may indeed be so remote as to be non-existent for practical purposes.

Whilst one is bound to enquire as to how far the factors of production can be made to yield the material returns upon which wages must in the final analysis rest, it is easily possible to press this investigation too far, and thus to develop an attitude which cannot be made to square with the acceptance of any ethical conception. Indeed, the orthodox economists of the last century carried their individualism so far as absolutely to foster this idea, and the consequence has been that we have been obliged to modify economic theory and practice substantially.

I am not prepared to subscribe to the view which is being pressed in some quarters, viz., that the so-called minimum wage is necessarily a false doctrine

or an unworthy ideal. Those who advocate its adoption and application unreservedly may often-times be somewhat misguided, and in their enthusiasm may even unconsciously be doing a great disservice to the cause they desire to assist by indiscriminately abusing those who hold another point of view. Though I am not unwilling to grant all this, it by no means justifies the writer in turning a deaf ear to a reasoned case and giving to it that thoughtful attention upon which alone it is possible to establish a sound judgment, to say nothing of initiating a policy which is worth defending.

As I have previously pointed out, the term "minimum wage" as applied to non-seeing workers is a misnomer, for it does not, in the remotest sense, convey the real meaning or significance of the situation. The basis upon which the demand rests may, if you will, be defined as ethical, but by no stretch of imagination can it be construed to be either determined or influenced by economic law, and the people who in this matter claim to be the pure apostles of Marxian dogma ought to be the very last to employ the phrase in relation to the labour of the blind, for the theory of economic determinism as defined by the great German economist deprives them of every vestige of justification.

In the interest of all concerned, then, it is advisable that we should only employ such terms as are calculated to preserve and express the meaning and significance of the idea we are striving to convey, and the particular term to which reference is here made is quite improperly requisitioned.

If the State should ever seek to standardise the income of non-seeing industrial workers, those responsible for the administration would not be likely to be so foolish as to confuse the issue by desig-

nating a glorified form of relief as in any degree comparable to the minimum wage of either the Civil Service officer or a Corporation employee.

The term "minimum wage," then, as applied in this connection, is just as misleading and quite as inaccurate as another equally foolish expression—I refer to the term "a compensation for blindness grant." Such irrelevant and meaningless phrases ought to be avoided. You cannot by the provision of mere cash payments equalise conditions that are absolutely dissimilar. It may seem somewhat hackneyed to suggest, but it is just as true now as in our schoolboy days to say "things that are similar are equal to each other," and *per contra* by inverting the same proposition it is not less true to affirm that "things wholly dissimilar are not comparable to each other."

It is quite conceivable that a system could be provided under which wages and grants-in-aid thereof could be so far fixed under competent and careful management as to provide for a reasonable standard of output and efficiency, and in that event my submission is that where such conditions are maintained most of the fundamental objections now preferred against such fixation would disappear.

Examples working contrariwise are so numerous, however, that unfortunately the strongest reproach that can with truth be levelled against the present agencies is provided by those very people who are working the system, and by the adoption of their present attitude they are effectively ministering to their own defeat.

I am sorry that it should have been necessary to so far digress from the main lines of my thesis, but had I not done so, it would have been impossible to give an answer to those who have been good enough to examine in detail the conclusions and

opinions to which I stand committed as expressed in other publications.

It has been previously stated that many methods of remunerating the services of non-seeing workers at present obtain in England and Wales. On examination it is revealed that while there are some elements in the varying systems which appear to suggest that a common agreement might be possible, yet there are many prevailing conditions which are so peculiarly local that they are not always easy of adjustment, or immediately capable of being eliminated, be they ever so undesirable.

It has also been previously noted that taking twenty-five workshops as providing a reasonable number from which to draw evidence, at least twelve variants exist under which wage payments and grants-in-aid of wages obtain. To take a few typical examples will be the better mode of approach to these complicated conditions, for we will then be able to appreciate the fact that widely divergent systems of remuneration inevitably lead to widespread discontent, and the fostering of an attitude that is not merely destructive of all good understandings, but (what is not less important) totally disregards any approach to a standard of productivity and efficiency.

As I see it, in the future, we must depend upon arrangements which have for their object the assessment of disability; and after a long experience and much research I am firmly convinced that the basis of calculation must necessarily be economic earnings, plus a disability allowance. Such a method provides the only sure foundation of accurate classification, so that all assistance given beyond economic earnings should be provided in the form of a disability grant made variable within certain percentage limits, expanding or contracting

in proportion to increased or decreased earning power. Nothing quite like this method has so far been adopted in this country, though in some parts of Canada it is being closely followed. In England and Wales, however, we have one or two feeble imitations, but nothing like a system can be said to obtain.

Recently I visited an institution where the piece-work rate of wages is being paid; in addition a bonus of 25 per cent. is given on economic earnings, and, at the same establishment, single men enjoy a subsidy of 13/- per week, whilst married men are granted an allowance of 22/6 per week. Women workers are provided with a set wage of 28/- weekly. Small allowances are also available for married men with children.

The following examples illustrate this system in practice :—

	SINGLE MEN.			MARRIED MEN.		
Economic earnings	£1	0	0	£1	0	0
Percentage subsidy		5	0		5	0
Augmentation of wages grant ...		13	0		1	2 6
Special grant for two children ...		—			4	0
	<hr/>			<hr/>		
	£1	18	0	£2	11	6
	<hr/>			<hr/>		

In other words, taking total receipts as given above, single men, economic earnings 55 per cent., grants 45 per cent.; married men, earnings 37 per cent., grants 63 per cent.

At four other workshops set scales of remuneration are provided ranging from 35/- per week to approximately 55/-, but with one notable exception the trade earnings are in the following proportion: economic wages $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.; relief $66\frac{2}{3}$ per cent.—revealing a disparity for which it is impossible to find justification.

CHAPTER VII.

DISABILITY ALLOWANCES CONSIDERED.

"Industry is, in itself and when properly chosen, delightful and profitable to the worker; and when your toil has been a pleasure, you have not earned money merely, but money, health, delight, and moral profit, all in one."

IT is a matter of common knowledge that most blind workers are profoundly dissatisfied with the methods of remuneration obtaining in the areas in which they are employed. It is of little use attempting to dismiss this matter with a mere shrug of the shoulders, and an ejaculation much to the effect that no system is likely to yield satisfaction.

The objections should be examined and an attempt made to eliminate every genuine cause of friction.

As I have indicated elsewhere, this dissatisfaction is to some extent due to the variability of the scales of augmentation, and to other factors, all of which influence the standard of life in a substantial degree, yielding conditions in one locality infinitely superior to those obtaining, it may be, even in an adjoining district.

It is not easy, however, to determine how uniformity can be secured even if it be ever so desirable, for innumerable considerations have to be carefully noted, and a thousand and one adjustments made, whilst essential characteristics may differ widely, all being of such material importance as vitally to affect the scheme of things.

I have previously alluded to the desirability of instituting some system under which every blind person would be entitled to receive a Disability Grant, to be determined on a percentage basis, according to the ascertained degree of capacity, the balance of his income being made up from economic earnings.

There are some difficulties associated with such a proposal—that is at once conceded—but the objections are infinitesimal when compared with the disadvantages with which we are at present confronted, for whenever we seriously attempt to grapple with the thorny subject of methods of remuneration we at once discover that the Institution across the way has another basis of calculation and declines to come into line for reasons that cannot be immediately overcome.

In our anxiety to promote the common weal we are invariably striving to reconcile the irreconcilable by attempting all manner of impossible readjustments, and the net result of our contrivings is merely to make “confusion worse confounded.”

When we are discussing the ability of an Institution or of an Area Committee to provide more substantially for non-seeing workers, we are so frequently apt to overlook the material potentialities of the district and to assume that the standard of life of the fully competent employee does not, and cannot, seriously affect the prosperity of the concern. A little consideration will at once dispose of this point of view, for the conditions governing the existence of the normal man must naturally influence the economic status of those unfortunate people who are less efficient.

It is granted that this is a proposition which can easily be carried too far, but its definite relevance

will not be disputed by those who have given any serious thought to the matter.

On more than one occasion I have been taken to task for venturing to say that the standard of life of non-seeing workers, since it is not determined entirely by productive energy, must be largely influenced by conditions governing the economic wellbeing of the fully equipped artisan, and, as yet, I see no very good reason to modify that point of view, for it seems to me that those people who can give either in services or goods 100 per cent. capacity to the community—or in other words, maximum value—are, from the very nature of things, entitled to say what proportion of their surplus wealth may be appropriated to the assistance of the less efficient.

Let me put this viewpoint in yet another way, not for the purpose so much of placating opposition, but rather with a view to emphasising this underlying and all-important contention.

I am obliged to admit that so long as loss of sight represents a handicap or limitation imposed on those who are engaged in the industrial sphere, so long must it be admitted that anything they are able to obtain over and above their productive value is a concession made by the community, not a right to be enforced. Such a concession rests upon the goodwill of Society, and it matters not in the slightest degree from whatever source the help comes—it is charity or the crystallised result of a benevolent attitude of mind expressed in money or in kind as the circumstances may most appropriately determine. It would be well if less emphasis were laid upon our alleged rights, and we concerned ourselves just a little more with the duties which we obviously owe to a community that is so exceedingly generous

to handicapped folk. If we were half as zealous in our determination to secure a reasonable standard of output and economic efficiency as we are to bring about an increase in the rates by which earnings are augmented, we would be enabled to put up a far better case to the employers than is possible to-day.

If we could be induced to talk and act a little more like *bona-fide* workers, and fret and fume just a little less because all the charity does not come our way, we would be far happier people, and our status as citizens would rise proportionately.

I hold that the foregoing considerations are relevant to any and all methods of remuneration, for the attitude of non-seeing workers towards these matters is, and must continue to be, of primary importance if the many problems with which we are at present confronted are to be solved.

Probably the nearest approach we have to the recognition of a system under which liberal subsidies are provided to minimise the handicap of blindness is found in the City of Hull, where the augmentation grant is an hourly rate which yields a higher weekly allowance than that available in any other centre in Britain where piece-work conditions of employment are recognised. This system has much to commend it, and if the workers concerned really mean business, they can demonstrate beyond all dispute that the receiving of a Disability Allowance suggests an appropriate and satisfactory way of meeting a difficult situation.

Before concluding this chapter I am persuaded to attempt a more complete vindication of the viewpoint I have previously expressed, namely, that in order to avoid the complicated systems under which grants are now provided for workshop employees and persons engaged in home industries, a uniform

disability allowance should be provided.

I have already clearly indicated that present methods of remuneration constitute a prolific source of discontent and dissatisfaction among blind workers all over the country. It must be obvious, therefore, to all who are desirous of promoting a better understanding, that something must be done in the near future to remove these poignant causes of dissatisfaction.

During the Great War, when the difficult and complicated task of assessing disability pensions had to be undertaken, it was found practicable and possible to grade these allowances in such a way as to make awards determinable by the degree of disability or handicap which would be experienced by the maimed man who had to enter the industrial sphere when he was no longer fit for active service.

It will be agreed, I think, that while our pension system cannot be said to have furnished a complete answer to every form of criticism, it has, in the main, provided a satisfactory atmosphere in which we can easily move toward the free discussion of particular cases, and generally secure their readjustment.

It ought not to be beyond our intelligence to devise such a system under which the disabilities of civilian blind persons could be properly assessed, and it is this aspect of the problem to which I desire most particularly to direct the attention of all who are associated with this work.

It is true to say, I think, that every method of remuneration has been applied at various times, save the one which would appear to be based upon the most practical and possible foundation: namely, that by which account is taken in definite fashion of the disability with which the worker assumes his

task. Minimum wages have been tried, and have resulted in some instances disastrously, whilst in other situations the system has been so modified and hedged about with conditions that it is difficult to find a precise term which accurately describes the method of remuneration obtaining.

Elsewhere, I have dealt in detail with the minimum wage and its effects in the Scottish institutions, and need not do more here than say that wherever this system has been tried it certainly falls far short of the ideal. I have chosen this description advisedly, because in this book there is no intention to open up old wounds nor to give an impetus to controversies, the revival of which can only be harmful to all concerned, in that such an attitude would only give rise to a bitterness of feeling that is at all times deplorable, and should, as far as is possible, be avoided.

I am conscious of the fact that whatever system of remuneration may finally be decided upon as offering the greatest measure of security, we will not, even then, find it easy to carry the State and the local authorities with us; for it must be obvious to those who have given but the slightest consideration to this problem, that the necessary money cannot be secured from voluntary sources, and our task will, therefore, be to so impress the legislature that the necessary volume of support will be forthcoming in order that any practical proposal may be brought to fruition.

It has already been noted that in workshops we have a considerable number of systems now in vogue which are designed for the augmentation of wages and the development of initiative; but, unsatisfactory as this state of things undoubtedly is, the situation reflected under the various Home

Workers' Schemes* gives cause for even greater anxiety.

In my judgment it is well-nigh hopeless to attempt to bring about uniformity where conditions are so essentially different; but, assuming that the district rates of payment are recognized and observed by all the agencies concerned, much of the inequality would, of necessity, disappear, provided that a disability grant were made available to all workers.

This latter provision would be a variable quantity, determined by the ascertained degree of capacity of the individual or group of individuals, and it would seem reasonable to expect that the liability should be borne as between the State and the County or County Borough Authority. The necessity for augmentation scales of payment, whether in the form of flat rates or sliding scales, would be altogether superfluous, because every worker would know that the fixing of a disability allowance would, in point of fact, represent not merely a maximum allowance, but an indication to him that he must strive to earn by his own initiative and capacity the difference between his disability allowance and the sum required for full maintenance.

The Inter-Departmental Committee, 1914-1917, came to the decision that the disability of blindness represented diminished earning-power as between 33 and 50 per cent. This approximation has never been seriously challenged; in point of fact, there is infinitely more evidence now to justify that conten-

* Home Workers' Schemes have been devised by the Ministry of Health to permit blind persons who are unable, for good and sufficient reasons, to enter the ordinary workshops for the blind, to be employed in their own homes at those handicrafts usually practised by non-seeing persons. In many respects, the new proposals are being worked admirably, and over 1,000 blind persons in England and Wales are now occupied under such schemes. The system of augmentation of wages, however, cannot be said to be satisfactory.

tion than the data upon which the Committee formed its estimate. It is suggested, however, that the whole problem could be re-examined in the light of existing knowledge, and such variations made as would seem to be desirable.

It may be quite reasonably argued that the imposition of such a system would ultimately lead to greater discrimination being exercised by the training and employment agencies, but most competent authorities will agree that we are fast approaching a condition of things when we must differentiate more particularly between real economic earning power and charitable subsidies, for we cannot hope entirely to escape from the rigours of competition, and in order to safeguard the interests of *bona-fide* workers some kind of productivity and efficiency test must inevitably be decided upon in the near future.

The properly-equipped training and employment agency has everything to gain from such an arrangement, whilst the interests of *bona-fide* workmen would thereby be effectively protected.

It is sometimes contended, particularly by a section of workers associated with home industries, that it would be inimical to the interests of the blind people to place earning-power at such a level as to exclude a large number of those who otherwise would be beneficiaries under the Scheme, but we cannot afford too freely to indulge in sentiment at the expense of sound common sense, and, if a large number of persons approach so closely to the status of unemployables as to be hardly distinguishable from that category, the pressure of circumstances will force us in the near future, whether we like or not, to reserve for such persons facilities for occupational interest, thus leaving a clear line of

demarcation between those who can, and those who cannot, be construed to be properly trained and properly equipped workers.

In an earlier paragraph I have referred to the finding of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind in respect to the ascertained reduction of earning-power, but it is perhaps necessary here to state that this finding only had reference to workshop employees—there were no other data available. Now, however, that experiments are being made in other processes than those generally adopted and practised in workshops for the blind, we may find that in consequence of greater scope being given to the enlarged activities of non-seeing people, and the margin between the seeing employees and trained blind workers in the same occupations, the percentage of deficiency is not nearly so high as that which now exists in generally recognised trades. Indeed, the experience of some Captains of Industry has already been recorded in this connection, and I have indicated elsewhere that Messrs. Henry Ford & Co. state that their blind employees are 100 per cent. efficient, while Direktor Perls of the Siemens-Schuckert Works, Berlin, told us some three years ago that the large number of non-seeing people under his control were 85 per cent. efficient.

From the statements already made it will be observed that two important considerations arise. The first point of material value is that an assessment of disability would appear to be the most satisfactory way of dealing with a legitimate claim. It is at once realised that you cannot draw a strict parallel between the men who were disabled in the Great War and ordinary civilian blind persons, but it is at least conceivable that many of the people who

have been bereft of vision sustained this disability as a result of the practising of their craft, and in such a way as to leave them with no claim under the ordinary compensation laws. Entirely apart, however, from that consideration, it is most reasonable and equitable to suggest that since this disability has been caused by circumstances absolutely beyond the control of the individual, and since it is desirable that, as far as may be, those encountering such a handicap should be encouraged to live a useful life, the State can best discharge its obligations by making a judicious assessment of that handicap, and so compensate the individual as to leave him free, by his own unaided efforts, to win from industry or trade such outstanding balance of income as will yield to him, plus his State assistance, a reasonable standard of life.

There is no necessity here to labour this point further. In striking contrast, however, to other methods of remuneration, it does appear to me, after very careful examination of the various systems now obtaining, that the one by which assessment of disability may be made can most easily and logically be defended. Something has been said from time to time about the factors which are calculated to cause malingering, but, however true this may or may not be, the consideration remains that if a properly constituted authority determines the value of our disability, and leaves sufficient margin in its calculations for the upward tendencies of production, it can easily be ascertained whether the individual is attempting in any real sense to give of his best to the community, or is withholding such service as that of which he is deemed to be capable. In any case, however, it will be obvious that if there is a disposition in individual

cases to register a lower standard of production than is reasonable, those adopting such a practice would be penalised because, under the system I am advocating, it is assumed that the assessment of disability will be such as to leave the individual free by his industry to contribute such balance as will provide a total amount, inclusive of disability grant and economic earnings, which will represent the average income of the normal man employed in the same industry.

This latter consideration leads me at once to the second point of outstanding importance in the analysis. I am endeavouring to make of wage systems. Heretofore, there would appear to have been no real attempt to arrive at a system which is calculated to yield an equal standard of life for blind and sighted workers employed in the same industry. The proposals I make are designed to achieve this object, and in this connection one has to meet at once the objections which are likely to be encountered. I am aware that it is an inviolable condition held by certain people that whatever your methods of remuneration may be, so far as they are applicable to the members of the blind community, they must represent in the main a lower standard of subsistence than that which can be claimed by the normal man who is rendering economic service to the State.

In this connection one is forced to the conclusion, however distasteful it may be, that if the subject is approached on purely economic grounds, the contention unquestionably is difficult to refute, and I am not going to attempt, by a process of specious argument, to question the validity of such a sane proposition. It would be unfortunate, however, if all questions had to be viewed entirely from such a standpoint. The only justification one is entitled

to advance in a matter of this kind is the basic contention that our handicap is not the result of circumstances over which we have any control. We have been permitted to live and grow up in the community entitled to certain statutory rights such as those expressed in our educational system; and if, through circumstances over which we have no control, it is discovered that our economic worth is less than that of other men, then it is the business of the State, not merely scientifically to organise our labour with a view to securing the maximum amount of production, but also to seek for the development of our capacity in such avenues as will ultimately result in our requiring the minimum amount of assistance; for this purpose special facilities must be available.

It is held that our productive capacity is from 33 to 50 per cent. lower than that of the normal man employed in any industrial pursuit in which it is possible to engage the labour of the blind; but it should be pointed out that such a condition is only reflected because we have been unfortunate in the choice of occupations, for industries have been selected in which it is intensely difficult for the man in full possession of the whole of his faculties to win from such pursuits an adequate standard of life. It has been demonstrated over and over again by enterprising employers of labour, both in Germany, Austria, France and America, that, given a proper division and classification of labour, the productivity of the blind and other handicapped people is considerably higher than is the assessment in this country. One only need refer again to the observations of Mr. Henry Ford in this connection for positive proof of the contentions I am here urging. The liabilities of the State and the Local Authorities from the financial point of view, so far

as the blind are concerned, are very much heavier than they ought to be, and are growing at an enormously accelerated speed simply because we have not attempted to deal with this problem along scientific lines. We have made practically no inquiry into the possibilities which industry and trade offer in respect of the employment of disabled people, and so long as we persist in adopting this conservative attitude of mind towards these important social problems, so long will it be necessary to exact large sums of money from the taxpayer for the maintenance of people, who, under a more enlightened *régime*, would derive a decent standard of life from the pursuit of an appropriate calling.

In my judgment the particular State department is far too much concerned with payments of grants and subsidies, and too little interested in the development of possibilities under which such State subventions would be rendered practically negligible. I am anxious for a recognition of disability payments, not because I hold that they will provide the most satisfactory solution of a difficult social problem, but because I am convinced that if it is discovered that the State, in order to give a reasonable standard of life, must provide large sums of money, then it may, from no other motive than that of economy, be induced to exercise its intelligence in the development of an entirely different line of policy and procedure, and seek by scientific means to reduce its financial burdens and incidentally to improve the status of handicapped people. It has been urged in certain quarters that the plea for assessment of disability is of a restrictive character, and that we only intend it to apply to those persons who are employed in Institutions, Societies and Agencies for the Blind. This conception does not in any degree represent the correct point of view.

As a matter of fact, I hold very tenaciously to the view that blind workers employed in the regularised Institutions have so far received the lion's share of all moneys that have been subscribed by the State, by local authorities, and by voluntary agencies. The fact is that the possession of earning power and the security of employment yielded to them by their association with Institutions would appear to give them a far smaller claim to consideration than those people who are struggling to gain a livelihood under very adverse conditions without the direct assistance of agencies for the blind.

No, if an assessment of disability is made, it should be capable of universal application, and should only discriminate in so far as the possession of the highest amount of earning power entitles the claimant for help to the least amount of disability grant. This conception is certainly equitable. It goes without saying that a very large section of the blind community cannot, under the best devised system conceivable, be transformed into wage earners: to such is extended all our sympathy and compassion, for their claim is one which a civilised community will never hesitate to support liberally; but in respect of the people who come within the sphere of employment,—for those the tendencies should be, in view of educational and other services that are available, to make the claims devolving upon the State and Local Authorities less exacting as the generations succeed each other, and in consequence also of the organisation and scientific application of the labour of which the blind are capable.

This is the ultimate objective to which I subscribe. It is no consolation to me to know that labour value is remaining practically a stationary quantity, whilst State subventions are increasing as the years go by. If I may be permitted to put

the case shortly, it is thus :—That the State should provide a reasonable disability grant in consequence of the handicap from which we suffer, and seek by a process of future research and development to minimise the necessity for such grants by the scientific organisation and application of the services we are capable of rendering.

CHAPTER VIII.

PENSIONS AND RELIEF IN BRITAIN.

"From the very nature of things indiscriminate charity is never wisely bestowed, nor does it ever secure permanent or beneficial results. Sympathetically regulated and ordered charity is one of the saving graces of the world, but if permitted to go undisciplined a most poignant evil is inflicted upon society."

I propose briefly to discuss the administration of pensions and relief in England and Wales, and to detail certain information which should be of value to all interested in this important problem.

It is by no means easy to explain the somewhat complicated system under which relief in various forms is administered in Britain. It will be convenient, however, so to discuss these matters as to bring into clear relief such aspects of the subject as are most nearly allied to each other, so that the reader may be able thereby to maintain that sequence of thought and understanding which is essential to a proper comprehension of the problem.

In this book it is not intended to discuss the various forms of assistance provided for the purposes of supplementing economic earnings; a considerable sum of money is annually expended in this way, and I estimate the amount to be at the present time quite £70,000 per annum. It is very necessary that we should have in mind this fact when the subject is under consideration. It should also be remembered that grants-in-aid of wages are steadily rising, and must continue to do so probably for

some years hence, owing to causes which I cannot enter upon here.

For specific purposes, then, I will attempt to define briefly the character of the relief given, the various channels through which it passes, and the type of case specially available for this form of assistance, detailing, as far as is possible, the approximate annual charges that are thereby incurred.

For our present purposes this relief may be considered under the following headings :—

- (1) Moneys voted by the Imperial Parliament for the provision of pensions.
- (2) Sums expended by County and County Borough Authorities under the Blind Persons Act, 1920.
- (3) Expenditure incurred by the Guardians of the Poor, (*a*) by Institutional treatment, (*b*) by Out Relief.
- (4) Pensions provided by private benefactions, trusts, etc.
- (5) Expenditure incurred by voluntary agencies in the provision of relief, mainly temporary in character.

It is not proposed to discuss these headings quite in the form stated above, for some attention must be paid to historical development; and therefore I must refer to some extent to the chronological order in which these phases of the work have been registered. I think, however, the foregoing may fairly be said to comprise the main aspects of the subject claiming our attention, and I propose, therefore, to treat it along the lines already suggested with a view to ascertaining what can be properly learned of fundamental importance in respect of each aspect of the subject.

When we are thinking of the administration of relief and pensions in Britain, it is essential to a

clear and comprehensive understanding of the subject that we should be able to appreciate the fact that there are many distinct sources from which such aid is available.

Though it is quite impossible to assign a definite date from which voluntary effort may be said to have taken rise, it is quite certain that it is by far the oldest form of assistance known to us, and to it may legitimately be attributed every enterprise emanating at a later date either from the State or from Local Authorities.

The oldest Statute, sanctioned during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, provided the necessary authority for granting relief to the blind in all cases of destitution, and from these simple beginnings a form of assistance was built up under the British Poor Law system, which, until the year 1891, made the care of the blind (in so far as it may be regarded as being a public responsibility) the business of the Guardians of the Poor.

In the meantime, the evolution of our voluntary system had developed with such astonishing rapidity as to yield to us an organisation which provided for the education, training, employment, and maintenance of the blind, which, though by no means adequate in its scope or perfect in its mechanism, was yet of sufficient material value to constitute the foundation upon which we have been able safely to proceed in the process of erecting a more perfect and stable edifice.

In Britain, as in most other countries, this voluntary effort has prepared the way for more comprehensive statutory provision, but it is obvious that had it not been possible to conduct much experimental work entirely unaided by the State, the results achieved within recent years must have been long delayed. We ought not to lose sight of

the fact, then, that the State is only able to obtain results because of the experience we have gained in dealing with these problems, and also because of the immensity of its resources, and not necessarily because it is either more humane in its outlook or more thorough in its organisation.

All the values to which we may lay claim in our social system have their real origin in voluntaryism, and it is because we prize these fundamental principles, evolved in this way, that they are made so real, so permanent, and are of such value to us.

In England and Wales there are about 72 separate voluntary Pension Funds being administered on behalf of the blind. Broadly speaking, the object of these investments is not to relieve cases of destitution, but rather to provide supplementary aid for those who are able to make independent efforts to earn something towards securing a livelihood, or to render help to those who have not reached such an unfortunate condition as to have been generally in receipt of Poor Law relief.

It is held by many competent authorities that when the circumstances of an applicant have become so necessitous that he is obliged to rely upon the agency of the Poor Law, he cannot be held to be a subject for voluntary assistance, but rather is he in such a condition as to conform for all practical purposes to a state of destitution, and he is, therefore, a subject for regular help from the Guardians of the Poor.

In the main this is quite the correct view to take; for if it were otherwise such funds would in effect be entirely appropriated to the relief of the rates and taxes rather than to the succour of those whose particular circumstances warrant the giving of supplementary assistance, not necessarily the provision of permanent and entire maintenance.

In this way, then, we are led to differentiate between the objects of philanthropy and the purposes of the Poor Law. This delimitation of the area of our operations enables us to apply voluntary Pension Funds in the directions where they are capable of conferring the greatest advantages, whilst, at the same time, they may not be encroached upon for the assistance of persons who are habitually recipients of Poor Law relief.

I find that in the year 1915 the invested capital for pension purposes yielded about £50,000 per annum, and this sum was, therefore, available for distribution. Though it is known that this amount has been somewhat increased within recent years, no exact calculation has been made; it is certain, however, that no very large bequests for pension purposes have been made during the past twelve years, and therefore the available interest cannot possibly exceed £60,000 per annum, whilst the capital investments are probably in the region of a million and a quarter sterling.

There are still too many sources of administration, but these are steadily being reduced in number, and it can be stated with absolute truthfulness that the larger and more important Trusts are being administered at the very minimum of cost. In the old days, many of these pension authorities were grievously hampered by regulations which so restricted their administration as oftentimes to make them appear ridiculous to the public; they had been narrowly conceived, and the conditions associated with their administration lacked that breadth of vision which would have made them the powerful agency for good which they ought to have been. It is satisfactory to know, however, that much of the restraining influence of "the dead hand" has disappeared, and the Trusts are now in

the hands of people who are generally able to take a broad and enlightened view of their functions and responsibilities.

Within recent years, owing to the introduction of the State Pension, the conditions by which voluntary funds were controlled and applied have undergone radical changes in many directions, and money has been released for the assistance of the young invalid blind who, under previous prevailing circumstances, were usually unable to secure anything like the same advantage, because such funds were generally appropriated to the assistance of the older people.

Before leaving this aspect of the subject, let me briefly summarise the present situation by saying that about 72 voluntary Pension Funds exist for the blind of England and Wales; the investments are probably somewhere in the region of one and a quarter million sterling, and the interest accruing is about £60,000 per annum.

I have already indicated that the sources of administration are by far too numerous, and have pointed to the fact that, as a result of closer co-ordination of the funds making for consolidation and economic administration, there is little doubt that the future will see wise amalgamations by the absorption of the smaller charities into the larger Trusts: it is merely a matter of time, for everyone is conscious of the need for such a reform and anxious to see the machinery expedited.

When we think of the agency of the Poor Law as a definite means by which assistance is brought to necessitous blind people, we must strive to visualise the great problem with which this machinery is required to deal.

Non-seeing persons in England and Wales number 46,822. From 64 to 67 per cent. are so handi-

capped by additional physical or mental disabilities as to be unable, for the most part, to make any serious contribution in labour values towards their own maintenance. It will be obvious, then, that all such circumstances involve a serious public charge, and the bulk of the expenditure made upon such persons is borne by the agency of the Poor Law.

In Britain a large number of residential Institutions have been established under the control of the Guardians of the Poor, and many blind persons, for whom it is otherwise difficult or impossible to provide, find a home in these establishments; about 3,500 persons are so accommodated.

There are no authoritative figures available showing the expenditure on this form of assistance to the blind, for they are dealt with as part only of a much larger number of people for whom such institutional treatment is deemed to be necessary, but the sum thus expended cannot be less than £260,000 per annum.

However one may hesitate to say so, the fact is that this method of treatment, in so far as it is made to apply to those for whom it is designed, is in the main both satisfactory and humane, and it would be difficult to devise a method of treatment which is less free from fundamental objections than that to which reference is here made.

In this connection it must be remembered that a very large proportion of the blind who are to-day resident in Poor Law Institutions are practically all untrainable persons. They are nearly all suffering from some additional physical or mental disability which precludes them from making a serious contribution towards their own maintenance by wage-earning capacity; therefore, the Poor Law organisation as at present understood would seem to offer

the most reasonable facilities for dealing with this aspect of the problem.

There is, however, another aspect of Poor Law assistance available to the blind which is far more difficult to explain. I refer to that method which is known to us as the provision of Poor Law Out-Relief as distinct from Institutional treatment.

This form of assistance, in its broadest implications, was set up to deal with temporary conditions, and, although the administration has oftentimes been grossly abused, in the main its functions are properly understood and efficiently discharged; but, in so far as the blind are concerned, this system, it is to be feared, represents a permanent obligation, for as soon as the blind become recipients of assistance from this agency, they invariably remain chargeable.

Though the incidence of cost may be reduced as they become eligible for other forms of help, such as the State Pension, or, as is sometimes the case, the obligation may be transferred from the Guardians of the Poor to the local Blind Persons Committee, still, in such an event, the financial operation is merely to transfer the burden of costs to another public administration.

Here again it has not been found possible to separate expenditure incurred by maintenance of the blind from that undertaken in respect of other recipients of out-relief, but a careful calculation leads me to the conclusion that the amount thus expended is a considerable sum, certainly not less than £200,000 per annum.

In certain circumstances, the help of the Poor Law may be invoked on behalf of the blind in yet another and more constructive fashion; for despite the fact that Section II of the Blind Persons Act, 1920, confers powers upon the County and County

Borough Councils, enabling them to provide for the general training of the blind, and to incur expenditure for these purposes, some Poor Law Authorities continue to exercise their powers under an old Statute in the same direction, and to provide training and maintenance charges.

It is probable, however, that when the provisions of the 1920 Act are better known and more generally understood, the Poor Law Authorities will decline to act in this way, for it is obvious that such duplication of powers can only lead to confusion and to a general misunderstanding, which good administration should at all times be careful to avoid.

It will be noted, therefore, that assistance rendered to blind persons under the Poor Law System expresses itself in the following definite ways :—

- (1) By the provision of Institutional treatment for those who have reached a state of destitution.
- (2) By rendering help in money or in kind to those who may be residing in their own homes whose income is otherwise insufficient for their proper maintenance.
- (3) By assuming responsibility for the payment of training fees and maintenance charges during the period of training.

I have already made a brief reference to the powers conferred upon County and County Borough Authorities under the Blind Persons Act; but, in order to promote a clearer understanding of the law in relation to these matters, it will be necessary to enter more fully into this phase of our subject.

Ever since the passing of the compulsory Education Acts for the Blind and Deaf, 1891 and 1893, there has grown up a very insistent demand for the

intervention of the State on behalf of the blind in other and additional spheres to that of education. This agitation reached its culminating point in the year 1920, when the Blind Persons Act became law. Briefly stated, the provisions of this Act are as follows:—

- (1) A pension of 10s. per week is provided for blind persons of 50 years of age, the pension being administered through the local Post Office, and generally conforming to the same conditions as those under which the Old Age Pension Acts are administered.
- (2) The responsibility of providing training facilities and subsequent employment is placed upon the County and County Borough Authorities, together with the further duty of attending to the needs of the unemployable blind.
- (3) The third and last section of this Act deals with the registration of Institutions, Societies, and Agencies for the Blind, and gives authority for the elimination of bogus organisations.

The importance of this piece of legislation can hardly be exaggerated. Its operations during a few short years have so completely reshaped our problem as to render present-day conditions infinitely superior to anything we have previously known; so much so, that within the next decade it seems to me that we ought to be in a position to take such steps as may be necessary actually to reduce public expenditure on some of the essential services by reason of the greater care that is being exercised in the prevention of blindness, and, as I hope, because of the greater efficiency of the blind themselves in industry, commerce, and in the various professions that are now being opened up to us.

At the present time we are expending more than £360,000 per annum in England and Wales on the provision of State Pensions for the Blind; and, although we may not yet have reached the maximum cost of this service, we are within measurable distance of so doing, for it is unlikely that the expenditure in any one year can exceed £400,000 unless the rate of the individual pension is increased, which circumstance is unlikely to happen in the immediate future.

It is now necessary to refer to a section of the unemployable blind who are being assisted by many of the County and County Borough Authorities under the Blind Persons Act. This is a form of help that is being steadily developed, and it is more than probable that under a proposed scheme of Poor Law Reform the various administrative provisions will be so co-ordinated and the machinery so remodelled as to place this section of the blind community directly under the control of one single Authority. This is eminently desirable, and would enable us to secure something approaching uniformity of treatment, a condition which, unfortunately, does not exist to-day.

As indicating the trend of present developments, it is to be observed that many County Borough Authorities are making substantial weekly contributions to the maintenance of all unemployable blind persons in their respective areas, whilst on the other hand some such Authorities absolutely decline to accept any such obligation, and refer all cases to the Poor Law Authorities. It is obvious, therefore, that these differences in practice cannot be allowed to continue, and we are anticipating in the near future such alterations in the administrative machinery as will bring uniformity of treatment and practice into an otherwise admirable system.

It will be observed from the statements I have already made that, in this matter of providing for the blind, we have in Britain what is known as a three-fold partnership—the constituent elements being the Voluntary Agencies, the State, and the Local Governing Authorities.

It is, for all practical purposes, an exceedingly happy and useful combination; not any one of these partners could of themselves have achieved anything like the degree of success that has been secured, because not any one alone possesses all the essentials which constitute our present system of welfare work; therefore, to attempt to dissolve this partnership would be an act of folly which no well-informed person is likely to desire.

It will be observed, then, that in the administration of the Blind Persons Act, 1920, greater uniformity of treatment and practice is deemed to be essential, whilst at the same time it is equally necessary that there should be more co-ordination among voluntary institutions in order that the funds available may be utilised economically and to the exclusive advantage of those for whom the money is so generously bequeathed.

Many people were seriously perturbed a few years ago when special legislation was promoted on behalf of the blind. It was felt that there would be a tendency on the part of the public to give less liberally towards the maintenance of benevolent objects; but in reality the unexpected has happened, for the fact that the State and Local Authorities have manifested confidence in the efficiency of the work undertaken has stimulated and encouraged the general public, and in point of fact they have been giving more liberally in recent years than at any previously known period in the history of philanthropy.

The following figures pertinently illustrate this tendency, and I need not attempt further amplification. No official statistics are yet available beyond 1924, but I have made a careful calculation for the years 1925, 1926 and 1927 from the material available, though it is not contended that the figures are exact, for it is not easy without official assistance to secure all the data required for such a calculation. 1919-20, £220,000; 1920-21, £250,000; 1921-22, £295,000; 1922-23, £371,000; 1923-24, £401,000; 1924-25, £409,000; 1925-26, £417,000; 1926-27, £422,000.

It must be borne in mind that the above-mentioned sums are contributed to the 130 agencies for the blind registered under Section III of the Act of 1920, and I ought here to say that it is not intended to convey the impression that all the sums so collected by the Voluntary Agencies are necessarily available for relief purposes.

It is, however, apparent (in view of the fact that training and maintenance costs are provided by Local Authorities) that, apart from the moneys allocated for the purpose of augmenting wages, very considerable sums are administered annually in the form of temporary relief by the Voluntary Agencies.

There are types of cases which as yet are not dealt with to any considerable extent by County and County Borough Authorities, and it is to the assistance of these that voluntary funds are at present largely applied. I regret, however, that no reliable estimate can be given, as it is extremely difficult, in the absence of a carefully-prepared analysis, to say how much is contributed in direct relief by the Agencies, though, unquestionably, the sum is a very considerable one.

In a very few years, however, expenditure for special cases will be available, and it is anticipated that voluntary funds can then be more largely utilised for experimental and research work—spheres of activity upon which we must be prepared to enter much more freely in the future if the social and economic status of the blind is to be raised in any degree commensurate with the knowledge we are steadily acquiring.

Though I make no claim that this review should in any sense be regarded as a comprehensive survey of a very complex subject, I think sufficient will have been said to give the reader a clear idea of the way in which the problem is being grappled with in Britain.

It is true that most of us are tolerably well satisfied with the progress that is being made in the direction of securing a more adequate provision for the unemployable blind; that, as I have already indicated, will soon be an accomplished fact when Local Governing Authorities administer such assistance through one appropriate Committee, whose specific work will be to give such public assistance.

The real problem before us is a much more serious and complicated one, viz., as to how far we can proceed to reduce the very high percentage of physical and mental inefficiency, which is to be found in the blind community. That is another phase of the work which must continue to occupy the minds of sociologists for some time to come; but I am optimistic enough to believe that we are making steady advances towards the end desired, and that with much patience and research a solution will ultimately be evolved. In the meantime, those desperately poor and unfortunate people are with us, and it is the business of the various relief

agencies to administer to their needs, a task they are performing with commendable ability and true humanitarian interest.

Through the long centuries of sorrow and tribulation, mankind in its quest for a better and easier way has ever been reaching out towards a more perfect and a more luminous day. Already the hopeful dawn is yielding place to a still more glorious morning, ushering in the happy time when the world will joyfully celebrate its emancipation from those evil conditions by which it has been enslaved, and which have engendered so much sorrow and suffering throughout all time.

It is to welcome this day of days that good men and women of all generations and of all climes have consecrated their lives, and it is to that wonderful consummation that the souls of many of God's children everywhere will be dedicated in the future. Let us, therefore, make our richest contribution to the work in the form of exalted and faithful service, knowing full well that for all of us the harvest time is at hand.

CHAPTER IX.

PROVISION FOR THE UNEMPLOYABLE
BLIND.

"I do not blame Phæbus or Nature which has set this bar betwixt success and failure, for I know how far high failure overleaps the bound of low success."

THERE has been a considerable amount of discussion of late on this subject, and, although I do not suppose I can say anything that will be regarded as original, yet I can claim to have thought out the matter very carefully, and whatever influences may have determined my mental outlook, I can say quite emphatically that an undue proportion of sentiment has not been permitted to dominate my attitude of mind.

From the very nature of things my training and experience have been such as to teach me always to look enquiringly, not only into the causation of things, but also into the probable effects likely to arise from any given set of proposals or conditions; and although most of us who think along such lines hotly resent the imputation that our humanitarianism is always subservient to other influences, we are nevertheless compelled to admit that mere sentimental considerations do not usually inspire us with enthusiasm.

It will be necessary, during the course of this chapter, for me to give utterance to some views which are not likely to become immediately popular; and whilst I do not deliberately intend to run

counter to the views of those who do me the honour to read this book, I am not constrained on that account to hesitate to express carefully-thought-out opinions and conclusions on a subject which is of vital interest to all concerned with welfare work on behalf of the blind.

It will be agreed generally, I think, that since so large a proportion of the blind community is precluded, owing to circumstances over which they have no control, from performing work which has an intrinsic economic value, it thereby becomes necessary to devise machinery which can adequately cope with the problem that is thus evolved.

In ordinary circumstances, the agency of the Poor Law has heretofore been available for dealing with such cases, but when the Blind Persons Act became operative, it was felt that, apart from cases of absolute destitution, blind persons should be removed from the purview of the Poor Law System: this does not imply that all the knowledge and accumulated experience gained under Poor Law administration should necessarily be set aside; on the contrary, such experience is invaluable in determining the allowances to be made, for all scales of relief may be said to be the result, not of some wild, haphazard decision, but rather are they the deliberate expression of well-conceived arrangements emanating from the most judicial minds.

It is a mistake to assume that what is called "Poplarism" runs riot throughout Poor Law administration. I am not concerned here either to denounce or to defend such a system, nor do I use the term in any objectionable sense. The point which I desire to make is that Poor Law administration in this country is usually the result of careful planning and thinking, and is not the outcome of an accident or series of accidents.

It is my considered opinion, therefore, that, in fixing allowances for unemployable blind persons, reference must be made to the scales of relief paid by Poor Law Authorities to persons who are suffering from some physical disability which precludes them from becoming wage earners in the accepted sense of the term. I do not imply by this statement that allowances should not be granted above the sums expressed in relief scales, but that such scales should be borne in mind when grants for unemployable blind persons are under consideration.

I well remember the time when the City of Bradford was regarded as the Mecca for all unemployable blind persons, allowances having been fixed at the rate of £1/-/- per week; the Bradford authorities were ultimately superseded by the Hull City Council who provided amounts of 25/- per week for all such cases; now we have the Borough Council of Birkenhead fixing an allowance of 27/6 per week. I suggest that this is a very unwholesome form of competition, and that it is not, in point of fact, in the best interests of the blind that this kind of vote-catching administration should be pursued, because sooner or later it is bound to defeat its own ends, and we shall have a violent reaction resulting in opposition from the very authorities whose help and co-operation we desire to cultivate.

I do not think we can possibly devise a uniform scale of allowances that will be practicable throughout the country; for it is obvious that the rateable value of a rural area must be taken into consideration when these grants are being settled, for after all, the ability of the community to find the money must have weight with those who are called upon to discharge the duties of administration. More-

over, the cost of living and other considerations, rent, etc., exercise influences which we are bound to consider, and no one, for example, would suggest that the scale which is applicable to West Suffolk would really be effective in the London area, or in any of the great centres of industry.

I desire to emphasise the fact that, although uniformity of treatment is an ideal towards which we ought legitimately to strive, we cannot wholly disregard prevailing conditions and insist upon that uniformity forthwith.

Even if the money had all to come from the National Exchequer, it would be necessary to differentiate as between areas, but this fact becomes more impressive when it is remembered that, for sound administration, we are bound to require that the areas taxed must bear their responsibility in the matter of judiciously expending the money raised partly by national taxation and local rates.

In England and Wales there are 146 County and County Borough authorities charged with the responsibility of administering the Blind Persons Act : 130 of these authorities are doing something in the direction of meeting the claims of unemployable blind persons. It may be that they are not spending so much money as some people think they should provide. Here again the question is one for the County and County Borough authorities to decide after taking due cognisance of the requirements of the blind of the area, and, if need be, listening to representations from those who are competent to speak on their behalf ; but in the final analysis, it is clear that there is no defect in the legislative machinery. If such machinery is not yielding all that is necessary, then it is the business of those interested in welfare work on behalf of the blind to press their local claims in a legitimate manner.

It must be remembered that we are dealing with a problem which presents considerable difficulties, and the fact cannot be ignored that the blind are not the only people who require consideration and assistance. I know that it has become fashionable to argue that we are not concerned about the interests of other necessitous folk; that they must organise and agitate for themselves: but as I have said on other occasions, and again repeat, the argument is stupid and futile. It is obvious that we cannot organise to deliberately ignore the interests of other people, nor to claim for ourselves a status with certain monopoly rights to the complete neglect of claims of equal importance and urgency with our own. Who, for example, is so stupid as to contend that the paralysed man or woman, or the confirmed epileptic, does not possess a claim to consideration equally strong with that of the unemployable blind? For the most part, these people are incapable of that initiative which is required to bring into being a definite organisation, and, therefore, it is the business of every member of the community to exercise his capacity and intelligence on behalf of those who are needing that sympathy which expresses itself in practical deeds.

Sixty-four to sixty-seven per cent. of the blind in Great Britain are unemployables—therefore, the expenditure involved is a very considerable one and can only be justified on a broad humanitarian basis. Economic considerations only enter into the problem when we begin to ask ourselves what amount of money can the nation afford at a time like this on unproductive services.

Obviously, we must do something, and there is no disposition on the part of sociologists to shirk the obligation, but it is equally true that we have no right whatever to attempt to fix standards of main-

tenance at a higher level than is obtainable by those who bring to their everyday tasks a hundred per cent. of efficiency. If, for example, it is held that 27/6 per week is an amount which should be forthcoming for the sustenance of unemployable blind persons, it is obviously unjust that people who are giving a full week's work to the community should only have the same amount of remuneration to subsist upon, for the worker must replace wastage and maintain effort by having proper food, clothing, and shelter, and those little comforts of life which go to make existence tolerable and justify the effort to produce. It is no argument to contend that wages in these respects are far too low, for we must deal with facts as they are, and remember that industry can only bear its relative proportion of wages.

It follows logically, therefore, that, in order to provide these liberal allowances, the standard of existence of workers in every walk of life must be adversely influenced, and there is a limit beyond which we have no right to seek to depress economic earnings in order that so-called humanitarian impulses may be satisfied.

I do not suppose that this doctrine will appeal to everyone, but may I press this theory a little further, for I have to postulate the contention that, so long as adults are to be found in the community rendering a full week's work for 27/- or 30/- per week, we are not justified in granting to non-producers the same standard of life as that provided for those whose business it is to supply the needs of the community, and consequently the allowances upon which unemployables subsist.

It is all very well to manifest an attitude of stolid indifference towards the expenditure that has to be incurred by the establishment of services of this

kind, and to try to gloss over the situation by comparing this expenditure with the cost of other services: but if the case is a really good one, it should be capable of a constructive intelligent defence because of its own intrinsic merits, and I submit that, whilst it is necessary and desirable to make sufficient provision for unemployable blind persons, the provision so sought should be reasonable in amount, and should not be so costly in its imposition as to exclude the claims of others who are equally necessitous.

The prosperity of a country surely depends upon the physical and mental fitness of its population, and anything which tends to depress that general standard of efficiency is not for all time a condition to be fostered and perpetuated. Civilisation must seek to eliminate by scientific means those elements which run counter to progressive development, and it is a matter of serious concern to sociologists to determine how far the instrument of charity should be utilised to preserve the unfit.

If we assume that practically 34,000 blind persons in England and Wales may be classified as unemployables, and that the amount which they are to receive, under the fantastic proposals made in certain quarters, is to be approximately at the rate of 27/6 per week *per capita*, we have a national expenditure on this item alone amounting to £2,210,000; but, making allowances for all possible deductions, such as the sum of £360,000 for pensions under Section I of the Blind Persons Act, 1920, and an approximate sum of £200,000 expended on out-door relief, together with about £62,500 provided annually by the voluntary pension societies, and a further sum of £20,000 secured under the National Health Insurance Acts as disability allowances, we get net increased annual ex-

penditure on this single service of £1,567,500—the merest bagatelle I suppose to those who apparently conceive the idea that wealth production is simply a spontaneous development.

May I sum up briefly my conclusions by the following final observations:—

(1) That it is desirable to provide allowances for unemployable blind persons sufficient for their maintenance at a percentage level above the scales generally administered by Poor Law Authorities in respect of single persons.

(2) That it is necessary to closely define the term “unemployable” and to be assured, before such allowances are guaranteed, that it is impossible, by properly applied training, to make the beneficiary a wage earner.

(3) So to regulate allowances as to constitute no inducement to persons of different sexes pooling public moneys in order that undesirable alliances may be contracted.

And finally, to see to it that such allowances do not reach a level equal to the average economic earnings of the fully equipped worker employed in the area providing the money for relief purposes.

Though I certainly make a claim to have carefully thought out this subject, it is quite conceivable that some of the issues may be open to a very different interpretation. One has been accustomed, however, to feel that so much hot air has been circulated in discussions on this subject, that it is a good thing, occasionally, that there should be a little plain speaking, and, I hope, clear thinking, on the matter.

In another place I have said, and I claim the privilege of repeating the observations, that “All human endeavour, whether it be expressed in educational enterprise, statecraft, social progress, religious or philanthropic effort, is inspired not only

by the desire to increase the sum total of human knowledge and thus promote human happiness, but it must also rest on the assumption that all these activities stimulate an abiding interest in the continuity of life; that continuity can only be maintained when man is given the urge and the impulse to work out his own salvation by conquering difficulties and disabilities. A paradise for the unfit is no more to be desired than the perpetuation of the old bad conditions against which we have had to contend in the generations that are gone. Take from life the motive power which induces us to strive for betterment and individual rehabilitation and you deprive man of that fundamental difference which distinguishes him from all other forms of animal creation.

CHAPTER X.

PLACEMENT WORK.

"It is not merely sufficient to agitate for a higher standard of life; unless those who are directly concerned are prepared to make a corresponding effort by giving proportionate service, such an agitation is destined to prove abortive."

THERE are many thoughtful people who are becoming somewhat disheartened by reason of the difficulties that are being experienced in providing suitable and remunerative occupations for the blind. Indeed, to the most optimistic of us, the matter is assuming a very serious aspect. It is becoming fashionable in this connection to choose the easier way, and to depend upon rate-aided or subsidised occupations. It is being assumed that it is of little or no importance in the world of affairs whether your blind person is employed in the true economic sense, or only engaged to give him a merely occupational interest.

It is one of my duties to read regularly all the Press notices one can secure through the agencies on matters pertaining to welfare work on behalf of sightless people, and whilst in pursuit of information, I often strike very definite confirmation of these views, and the rather reactionary tendencies noticeable in the polemics of the blind world.

Speaking on the subject of the employment of the blind, a certain City Councillor recently made the following observations :—"It seems to me, and to

many others, that one of the most absurd of the many absurd things that are being done is the endeavour to make blind people as miserable as possible by keeping them occupied at some probably futile employment, instead of allowing them to extract, unfettered, the fullest enjoyment from life. It would be much better if these afflicted people were fully maintained, instead of attempts being made to find them work to keep them occupied at all costs." This gentleman went on to elaborate his theories, all designed to show that systematic forms of employment for blind people represent a condition somewhat akin to serfdom.

I am conscious of the fact that such an attitude of mind cannot possibly appeal to most of my readers, but these ideas are gradually taking root in soil where it is least desirable that they should be planted. A system of pseudo-philosophy is steadily being brought into existence, the tenets of which cannot fail to be disastrous to the practical work in which we are engaged.

It will be agreed generally, I think, that the development of employment facilities for handicapped people must, of necessity, be costly, and perhaps it may be said with some degree of truth that for some almost inexplicable reason, we seem to have fastened on the Cinderella occupations of industry, and to have conceived the notion that they are most appropriate pursuits for the employment of the blind. Indeed, it would be difficult to dispute the contention that the occupations so chosen must, at the period of their original application to the blind, have provided opportunities which could not, at that same period, have been equally applicable to other trades; and, therefore, precedent and history have conspired to produce certain results which, whatever may have been their disadvantages, have done

more to build up the social and moral character of the blind community than any other instrument or process could have provided.

Voluntary institutions, until recently, have been so handicapped financially that, more than all else, they have been required to produce immediate practical results for the expenditure they have been free to incur. It has not been possible heretofore to devote the time and attention which are necessary to the discovery and development of other occupations, and the result has been that we have settled down to the manipulation of a few pursuits, to the conduct of which blind persons have applied themselves.

In the sense in which we are free to speak of our industrial development, we can only look back over a period of approximately sixty years, and I have no hesitation whatever in saying that the changes wrought in the social and industrial conditions of the blind since those early developments have been, and still are, phenomenal.

I know it is the practice in certain quarters not only to belittle what has been accomplished in the past, but also to make light of modern achievements; but the facts of history and sociology place my contention beyond the pale of controversy.

Now that there is a disposition on the part of the State, County and County Borough Authorities to assist more liberally in the development of our activities by providing some of the money necessary, we are hopeful that the relief thus gained from financial stress will enable us to give the necessary time and attention to the searching out and practising of many other pursuits which we think may properly be opened up to competent non-seeing workers.

I absolutely dispute the contention that it is the business either of the State or the Municipalities to so provide for the capable blind man or woman as to render them entirely independent of any form of daily employment. To the men and women with whom I am associated, such a life, such an existence, would simply be intolerable.

The justification for our existence in this work-a-day world is based upon the consideration that all the facts of life so conspire as to demand from us service to society in proportion to our ability. Civilisation only requires from us that measure of service which our mental and physical faculties enable us to perform, and I submit that the disability of blindness does not relieve us of an obligation which is common to the human race, namely, that of justifying our existence either by the labour of our hands or brains.

The people who talk so glibly of providing a Utopia for the unfit have very little grasp of human needs, and certainly know nothing of the psychology of the blind.

For my present purposes, then, I am taking it for granted that my readers are in agreement with the proposition which affirms that the most practical way by which you can minimise the discomfiture and disabilities of blindness are best expressed when congenial, permanent and remunerative employment is provided for the absorption of our energies, and the promotion of our mental well-being. It may be observed, however, that only a proportion of the blind can be so employed, and to that reservation I at once assent.

If general approval is given to the foregoing proposition, then we are free to consider, not only the conditions that obtain in industry at the present time, but some other and perhaps equally important

phases of this problem. I will, therefore, proceed to deal with some of these matters as briefly and concisely as is possible.

It was laid down by the Inter-departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, 1914-1917, that non-seeing persons were deficient in productive capacity, when compared with artizans engaged in kindred industries, to the extent of between 33 and 50 per cent., but a closer analysis made by the English Board of Health on the basis of economic earnings, suggests that the deficiency may be even greater.

Now it is obvious that if this fact is reflected throughout the whole of our industrial organisations, we are compelled, in consequence, to admit that purely economic earnings, so far as they are applicable to the blind, do not yield, in the present state of our industrial development, such subsistence wages as are necessary; therefore, recourse is had to various expedients for the purpose of increasing weekly income, and thereby promoting the happiness of all engaged in these manual pursuits.

There was a time when I ardently believed and strenuously advocated the adoption, not only of a minimum wage, but what is euphemistically termed "a living wage" for all blind persons, irrespective of limitations of output or any other industrial factor which tends to affect income adversely; but I have long discarded that point of view, because every shred of my experience has run counter to that which formerly constituted my wage ideal.

Many readers will have noted from time to time the views I have endeavoured to express in respect of the various methods by which wages are augmented throughout the British Isles, and earlier in this book I have amplified that opinion. I have said, and may I again be pardoned for repeating

the statement, that none of these methods appear to me to be free from very definite objections. Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that, in this very imperfect world, all efforts towards perfection are relative, and that the ideal scheme may never perhaps be evolved.

We are justified, surely, in asking ourselves, when we are thinking of methods of remuneration, whether this scheme, those arrangements, or that plan, is calculated to stimulate and encourage the best impulses by which human beings are actuated. I do not believe that a dead level of payments contributes towards this result. Unless there is something in the arrangements which tends to encourage initiative, foster capacity and reward enterprise, the zest is taken out of life, and all motive power is consequently destroyed.

The special workshops for the blind have a real and an abiding place in the life of the community; the services they are rendering appear well-nigh incalculable; but do these organisations represent the last word that is to be said authoritatively in respect of the employment of the blind? With all due deference, I venture to think otherwise. These establishments are, from the very nature of things, costly to maintain, as are most good things that are worth preserving. The wages paid are, generally speaking, the highest amounts possible, having regard to the cost of production, the maintenance of other services and the limited resources at the disposal of the managers.

Indeed, when we think of remuneration and compare this with the cost of maintenance, the results are often disappointing, but it would be difficult to see how they could possibly be otherwise unless the workers were exploited by paying to them bare standard piece-work or other rates; but what-

ever may be said in criticism of those who are responsible for administrative work in this sphere, as I have shown earlier, the charge that is sometimes made by irresponsible people that the workers are being exploited cannot possibly be sustained. Heavy expenses are often incurred by these agencies by reason of trade losses; much could be done, I think, to minimise this wastage if only the agencies concerned would trust each other more implicitly, come together and discuss their difficulties and make a serious attempt to promote a central buying and selling organisation. It may be that, in the near future, local authorities will assume a greater degree of responsibility for the management and control of workshops for the blind, and, if so, there will be a very great temptation on the part of those charged with the conduct of the selling agency to dispose of the goods at almost pepper-corn prices, because they will be able to go back to the rates and cover their deficiencies. The voluntary institutions could never compete with enterprises of this kind. Surely, this is a matter which should engage our serious attention! for whether we believe in the preservation of voluntaryism, or if, on the other hand, we are whole-hoggers for State and Municipal intervention, we have no right to use public moneys for the purpose of inflicting a positive injury upon manufacturers engaged in kindred industries—business men who contribute their quota of rates and taxes in order that we may have money for the prosecution of our endeavours.

This brings me to one of my basic contentions, namely, that we should seek so to organise the labour of the blind as to encourage the development, not of the least remunerative industries, but of those occupations which are of themselves economically worth while pursuing. The management

of workshops for the blind is, as a rule, particularly handicapped by reason of the fact that there is a considerable legacy of inefficiency to cater for, and the low standard of output which results from the efforts made involves the organisations concerned in heavy overhead charges and large expenditure for the augmentation of wages. I venture to suggest that in the past far too little attention has been paid to the choice of an occupation. I would like to see consultative committees established in wide county areas, composed of practical people who know the problem associated with welfare work on behalf of the blind, and I would like to see those committees applying themselves to the selection of appropriate pursuits, paying some regard to the attainments and qualifications of the man or woman to be placed, and with an outlook which is not restricted to the four walls of a regularised workshop.

The term "Placement work on behalf of the Blind" is an expression frequently employed by organisations in America, and is, perhaps, not in itself calculated fully to express precisely what it is intended to convey when separated from its context.

The expression is meant to convey the idea that work can be undertaken other than that usually practised in association with the regular institutions and workshops. It is described as "Placement Work" because the duty of finding posts devolves upon certain officers whose business it is to influence such appointments.

As far back as 1910 some of the American organisations began to give serious attention to this project. They had discovered, just as we have found, that employment in special workshops is exceedingly costly and the economic results profoundly disappointing. Accordingly, they resolved to apply

themselves to the discovery and development of such facilities as are calculated, not only to reduce public cost consequent upon the training of the blind, but also to evolve a method of procedure, the material results of which, to say the least of it, would be quite as satisfactory as those that can be obtained from workshop employment, plus subsidies. So far as records are available, it would appear that steady progress was being made up to 1914, when the war temporarily put an end to experimental work, and, in some measure, retarded progress for a few years.

In the meantime, much experimental work had been undertaken in Germany upon similar lines to those followed in the United States, and in 1915, owing to the shortage of labour at the command of the German authorities, disabled people of all categories were pressed into service, a substantial number of sightless people being thus engaged for the performance of simple operations in the engineering and allied trades.

Although the idea of providing industrial employment in the regularised workshops for the blind took root in Germany much earlier than in this country, generally speaking we have progressed more rapidly, and it is quite safe to say that on the whole a much larger number of sightless persons are regularly employed here. It would appear also that they are receiving higher wages in the workshops for the blind in this country, owing, probably, to the system of State and Municipal assistance, and to the vast amount of voluntary help which is available.

In 1915 employment of the blind in Germany underwent a radical change. Heretofore, very little had been done, apart from the voluntary agencies; but the passing of the Disablement Law

requiring every large employer of labour to absorb at least two per cent. of disabled men caused a great deal of experimental work to be undertaken, and the blinded operatives shared in the general advantages that accrued.

One of my correspondents says—speaking of the Siemens-Schukert-Werke, Berlin—"In the centre of this citadel of industry, men have found a home whose lives, only a few years ago, were regarded as hopeless. These men, who in the world war lost their sight, now sit at machines of all descriptions like able-bodied men and perform fully-paid work."

Though a considerable number of people employed are ex-service men, it must be understood that blind civilians are also engaged, and, from the correspondence in my possession, it would appear that the manipulation of the machines is accomplished with equal success by both.

Direktor Perls of the Siemens-Schukert-Werke, in 1915, gave the blind men light work to perform, such as pasting, packing, etc., but only as an expedient until other forms of labour could be provided. To enable them to work on machines, however, safety devices had to be invented and attached, such as would exclude all possibility of injury. He re-arranged every machine in a manner so as to cover any of the parts which might be dangerous to the blind; he himself experimented, blindfold, with every machine and with every safety device, and he still continues to work out these improvements. He contends that they can confidently work on every machine without the slightest anxiety, and when one sees them so engaged it is urged that it is difficult to realise their disability.

A film has just been received by the National Institute for the Blind showing all these operations

on a countless number of machines, and the dexterity and skill of the workers is such as to create a most favourable impression, and disposes of the notion that only a few operations can be undertaken by non-seeing people.

It is contended that the blind do more work than their sighted colleagues, as they are not subjected to any distractions. There are 110 blind people working in the Siemens Combine, whilst more than double that number are being instructed there. The claim is made that about 108 different processes are practised by the blind operatives, and that it is possible for a man to look after two or even three automatic machines.

From time to time translations have reached me from the German magazines which seem to indicate that there is a probability of the results having been somewhat exaggerated. I think, however, sufficient evidence is available to show that the earning power of the average blinded operative is probably about 80 per cent. of that of the normal man. This is, of course, very considerably in excess of the earning power manifested in this country in workshops for the blind.

Statistics have been published showing that only 41 per cent. of the blind in this country are able to perform work having any real economic value, 25 per cent. of which is of such a low standard as to be well-nigh negligible, and only 16 per cent. so efficient as to comply with the requirements of the Ministry of Health, that is to say, able to earn in the case of women, on bare piece-work, at the rate of 8/- per week and upwards, or, in the case of men, 16/- per week and upwards.

Recent enquiries show that in France about 90 blind persons are employed in the engineering trade, and that the wages they are earning are

about 85 per cent. of those obtained by sighted labour engaged in the same branches of industry. This consideration leads me to the conclusion that the standard of proficiency and speed attainable compares more than favourably with the economic results accruing from the efforts of those employed in the special workshops.

It is the practice of the Ford Motor Co., Detroit, Michigan, to employ in their works a number of physically defective persons whose economic value would otherwise be below the required standard. According to the statistics of the Highland Park Factories, one out of every three employees is suffering from some definite physical disability and must have special tools provided in order that they may execute the work satisfactorily. Among this number are to be found 45 blind men, who, in some instances, perform the work more thoroughly than their sighted colleagues; they are given the work for which they are most competent, and which would otherwise have to be carried out by a sighted worker. The blind receive the same rate of remuneration as the other employees and the minimum wage is six dollars per day. The tasks most often assigned, and the most easily accomplished, are the cutting of paper, the calculating and packing of various small pieces of mechanism, the collecting of screws, nuts, bolts, and suchlike articles, and assisting sighted men to gather up and make ready certain tools and materials, etc. Their work, as a whole, is entirely satisfactory from the employer's point of view, and the men, without exception, are happy in their surroundings, and content with the arrangements made for their welfare. In spite of the severe disability under which they labour to gain a livelihood, they are considered 100

per cent. efficient in the work entrusted to their care.

For the purpose of my observations, I include in my term "Placement Work" all the occupations which in this country so far do not rank as grant-earning services, and, in this connection, may I call attention to the results that have been obtained by practitioners in the profession of massage.

Training of blind persons in Massage, Remedial Gymnastics, and Medical Electricity has been undertaken by the National Institute for the Blind since 1915. Of the number trained at, or under the auspices of, the National Institute for the Blind, who have been established, approximately 85 per cent. are carrying out the profession of Massage and are self-supporting; for the most part, their fees and salaries are considerably in excess of the wages paid to those in institutional employment.

The following figures may be of interest :—

Number holding Hospital appointments	17
„ engaged in private practice	45
„ combining private practice and hospital appointment	24
„ combining teaching and private practice	5
„ combining teaching, private prac- tice and clinic appointment	1
„ combining private practice and nursing home	1
Total	93

Of the remaining 22 blind masseurs and masseuses whose names appear in the records of the Massage Department of the National Institute for the Blind

- 5 are deceased.
- 5 not working through old age.
- 5 not working through ill-health.
- 2 retired.
- 2 just started out in practice.
- 3 lost sight of.

Statistics show that approximately 120 blinded soldiers from St. Dunstan's have been trained, and are carrying out the occupation of Massage.

The authorities of St. Dunstan's have very kindly supplied me with the following information:—

Number of posts secured for telephone operators 79, of whom 17 are in Government Offices, and 5 are employed by their old firms. Number of shorthand-typists employed 33, of whom 11 are in Government Offices, and 5 have returned to their old firms. Two men are employed as ear-phone testers, one with the British Thomson Houston Co., Ltd., Coventry, and one with Messrs. S. G. Brown, of Acton.

I think it will be agreed that these are exceedingly creditable results.

It is well known that telephony provides occupation for a considerable number of blind persons, though, in consequence of developments that are taking place through the installation of the automatic system, it is probable that this sphere of employment will be much more restricted in the future. Returns are to hand showing that about 72 civilian blind persons are engaged as telephonists in England and Wales, and that the average wage is £2/8/3 per week. We are aware that this is below the regulation rate, but it must be remembered that many sightless people are employed in very small offices where their economic value must be taken into account by a private employer when he is re-

quired to fix remuneration. Here again, the result compares more than favourably with persons employed in institutions.

It is known that, although pianoforte tuning is an occupation recognised under the Ministry of Health's regulations, a number of men in this profession are not registered under Home Workers' Schemes because they are in such remunerative posts that no monetary help is necessary from sources outside their particular occupation. Thirty of such men last year earned £6,987, or an average of £232/18/-. The lowest amount earned by any one of these men was £192 during the year. For the purposes of this calculation, I have excluded the returns of four business men whose incomes would have distorted the figures out of all proportion to the real average. It will, however, be conceded, I think, that the result is an exceedingly creditable one.

It is only within comparatively recent times that any serious attention has been given to the provision of work for the blind outside the usual channels, but the result has been very gratifying.

A number of progressive employers during the past three years have permitted experiments to be conducted in their workshops and factories. Though it is not claimed here that every such experiment has been an unqualified success, it is possible to say, without exaggeration, that the results have more than justified the efforts made and the expenditure incurred. Among such employers I may mention, Messrs. Cadbury's of Bournville; Messrs. Fry's of Bristol; The Kodak Co., Wealdstone, Middx.; Messrs. Pears, Soap Manufacturers, of Isleworth; Messrs. Pascall's, Ltd., Messrs. Metropolitan Vickers Electric Co., Ltd., etc., etc.

One could continue, almost indefinitely, making reference to individual blind persons who have in various parts of Britain so far triumphed over their disabilities as to have gained honourable distinction in many callings, but to do so would merely be to single out persons who possess quite outstanding abilities, and it is not possible upon such evidence to construct a plan which will be capable of general application.

My contention is that we need to concentrate more upon the development of many additional occupations in which non-seeing people can engage, and the experimental work that has so far been undertaken proves beyond doubt that the thing is not impossible. I have before me, as I write, a long list of mechanical processes which experience shows can be safely undertaken and discharged by non-seeing people, and it is confidently anticipated that during the next few years we shall be able to demonstrate, not merely that these processes have been satisfactorily exploited, but that, in consequence, a fair number of blind workers will be engaged and in receipt of substantial economic earnings.

May I, then, briefly summarise the views I have tried, very imperfectly I am afraid, to express in this chapter.

(1) All efforts to ameliorate the condition of the blind who are otherwise physically fit are best directed so as to secure permanent, remunerative, and congenial employment for them.

(2) That the special workshops for the blind have an abiding place in the corporate life of the body politic, and inasmuch as they do provide training and employment for a number of people who need special care and attention, their function is a humanitarian one. It would appear desirable,

however, that greater attention should be concentrated upon the pursuit of other than the regular occupations now practised in order to reduce trade losses, increase the margin of available opportunity, and encourage enterprise and initiative among those for whom such special establishments exist.

(3) That those charged with the responsibility of managing the special workshops should come together, pool their experience, and work for the promotion of central buying and selling agencies, and thus avoid a form of competition that cannot fail to be inimical to all concerned.

(4) Availing ourselves of the knowledge and experience gained both in Britain and abroad, in the matter of selecting occupations at which suitable blind persons may be employed, we should look firstly to the pursuit of those facilities which may be said to have a real economic value, and only regard special workshop employment as one of a number of alternatives.

(5) In order to promote this object, consultative Committees should be established upon which persons of knowledge and experience in the blind world should serve, together with representative employers, in order so to direct the business of research and investigation as to produce practical results. With this end in view an Appointments Board has been established under the auspices of the National Institute for the Blind, and there is every reason to believe that the result of its activities will considerably enlarge the sphere of available knowledge and experience.

I venture to submit that proceeding along these lines will enable us, in the future, to widen the horizon of our opportunities, and bring us ever nearer to the status of the ordinary citizen. We ought not to be content with providing subsidies for

blind workers; it would be infinitely better to be concerned with the re-modelling and re-shaping of all available machinery in order that we may be enabled to win from industry a higher economic reward for our labour. I do not believe that it is absolutely essential that we should for all time look to the instrument of charity for the greater portion of our maintenance; rather should we concentrate on the highest possible development of our faculties, in order that we may derive as little as possible from the resources of benevolence. All methods of remuneration which do not tend to foster this important principle are, in my opinion, based upon fallacies which it is our business to remove with as little delay as possible.

The spirit of self-reliance should be more sedulously cultivated by those who are responsible for the education and training of the blind; for the development of an attitude of independence is the very mainspring of all our future happiness. The ingenuity of statesmen cannot give to us the priceless heritage we will have lost if we fail to appreciate all that is thereby involved.

c.4

P8

The British blind.

HVL945

P8

c. 14

AUTHOR

Purse, Ben

TITL

The British blind.

DATE
LOANED

BORROWER'S NAME

